

Japanese is Possible!
Lesson 6

Particles Galore

- Particles
- "Koto"
- New Words
- ko-so-a-do words

Particles

Japanese uses several particles to give most of the words in a sentence a purpose. Usually, many of the words in a sentence will be followed by a particle. Most are one syllable, a few are two syllables, and a precious few are more than that.

The particle WA

This particle tells that the preceding word is the topic of the sentence. A good way to translate it is *as for*.

kono mise no ryouri wa oishii desu.
[This store's food *as for* delicious is.]
The food here is delicious.

kore wa boku no mono desu.
[this (as for) I ('s) thing is.]
This is mine.

Hiroshi wa tsuyoi desu.
[Hiroshi (as for) strong is.]
Hiroshi is strong.

Difference between WA and GA

People often confuse *wa* and *ga*, since usually *ga* marks the subject of a sentence, but *wa* often does as well. One way to think about *ga* is that it emphasizes the subject as in "this and not something else did..." *Wa* often emphasizes the action or verb of the sentence. Take the following examples:

Dare *ga* mise e itta ka. (Emphasis on dare)
Jon san *ga* itta. (Emphasis on Jon)
[Who *sj* store to went? John *sj* went.]
Who went to the store? John did.

Jon san *wa* doko e iku ka. (Emphasis on where Jon went)
Jon san *wa* mise e iku.
[John *as for* where to go? John *as for* store to go.]
Where will John go? John will go to the store.

The examples above illustrate an important point. When a question word is the subject of a sentence, it must be followed with *ga* not *wa*. Also, the subject of the response to the question must have *ga* after it as well.

If you're interested in all the nuances, I'm sure there are several websites that have in-depth info. Also, try searching Deja.com for newsgroup posts from about 1 or 2 years ago. There was a big discussion on sci.lang.japan about this very topic. I would also strongly recommend *Making Sense of Japanese* by Jay Rubin, listed on the [book recommendation](#) page.

Example:

kore ga hayai desu.

This is fast. (as opposed to **that** or **the other thing**)

kore wa hayai desu.

[this (as for) fast is.] (You wanted to know about this? It's fast.)

The particle NO

No is often best translated as 'S (the 's in Bob's). It is known as the *possessive* particle. You could also think of it as the preposition *of* in English, *de* in Spanish or *di* in Italian.

kare wa boku no tomodachi desu.

[he *as for* I 's friend is./He is friend of I]

He is my friend.

are wa haha no kami desu.

[that over there *as for* my mother 's hair is./that over there is hair of my mother]

That is my mother's hair.

kono shounen no mise wa chikai desu.

[this boy 's store *as for* near is.]

This boy's store is nearby.

You can see in the above example that a boy probably does not own the store. Boy is just a characteristic of the store, i.e. it caters to young boys. Often, you can express an attribute this way by using *no* after a common noun (such as boy, book, tree, etc.).

sono konpyuutaa no mise wa tooi desu.

[that computer *attribute* store *as for* far is.]

That computer store is far away.

The particle DE

De often follows the location where an action takes place. It could translate to **at**, **in**, **on**, and probably another bunch of words in English, but the important thing to remember is that it's an action that *happens*, it's not a state, as you'll see below.

Examples:

Nihon de sake o nonda.

[Japan *loc* sake *oj* drank.]

I drank sake in Japan.

Densha de bangohan o tabeta.

[Train *loc* supper *oj* ate.]

I ate supper on the train.

but:

Nihon de sumu. <---Bad!

[Japan *loc* reside.]

I live in Japan.

It looks ok, right? But it isn't. Living isn't an *active* sort of action; it's just a state of being that goes on for some span of time. Be wary of this.

A useful word - "koto"

Koto literally means "thing" in an abstract sense, as in "what kind of things to you do at those meetings." It's not the kind of thing you can touch, hold or spit on. In many cases, you can change a verb into a noun phrase by adding koto to it. We'll just look at one use of it in this lesson.

Take a typical short sentence:

Sushi o taberu.

Eat sushi.

If we add "koto", it allows us to use the phrase as the subject of a larger sentence.

Sushi o taberu koto

The act of eating sushi

If we place a *koto* noun phrase before *ga dekiru*, we get a nifty way of saying "can do..."

Watashi wa sushi o taberu koto ga dekiru.

I can eat sushi.

Sushi o taberu koto ga dekiru ka.

Can you/he/... eat sushi?

Now, if you're really observant, you might be saying, "hey! that first sentence has two subjects," or "why would 'sushi eating' be performing the action in the second sentence?" Here's your answer. *Dekiru* literally is closer to "is doable" than to "can do..." So the *wa* in the first sentence doesn't mark the subject at all; it just shows which topic we're discussing ("I" in this case).

Watashi wa sushi o taberu koto ga dekiru.

[As for me, sushi eating is doable.]

Useful words to add to your list!

Adjectives:

akai - red

chikai - near

mijikai - short (hair, etc)

nagai - long

oishii - tasty, delicious

takai - expensive

tooi - far

tsumetai - cold

yasui - inexpensive

Adverbs:

itsumo - always

yukkuri - slowly, leisurely

Interrogatives:

itsu - when

Nouns:

bangohan- supper, dinner

boushi - hat

densha - train

kami - hair (the same as the word for god)

konpyuutaa - computer

koto - thing (abstract)

kumo - cloud

mise - store

mono - thing (concrete)

otoko - man

onna - woman

okaasan - mother

otousan - father

shoujo - young girl

shounen - young boy

tomodachi - friend

tabemono - food

ude - arm

kuchi - mouth

mono - thing

Verbs:

sumu - to reside (don't try using this word yet)

dekiru - to be doable

ko-so-a-do words

In Japanese, things are often quite organized. One example of this is the ko-so-a-do concept. Japanese has a few sets of words with the same or similar endings, and these four syllables switched in at the beginning. Note this pattern.

kore - this

sore - that

are - that over there

dore - which?

Just as a reminder, remember that for now you should pronounce all the vowels in Japanese. There is no such thing as a silent 'E' in Japanese. So you would pronounce 'kore' as KO RAY, but of course with a Japanese R, not an English one.

Back to the topic, you can see from that set that **ko-** denotes something within the grasp of the speaker, **so-** is for things a small distance from the speaker, **a-** is for something far from the speaker, and **do-** makes interrogative words.

kore wa watashi no mono desu.

[this *as for* I's thing is.]

This is mine.

are wa kuruma desu.

[that *as for* car is.]

That is a car.

dore ga yasui ka.

Which is inexpensive?

These four words are known as *demonstrative pronouns*, and must precede either a particle or *desu*. Another useful set of *ko-so-a-do* words are also demonstrative pronouns, and end with **no**. Nouns can follow this set, which makes them rather useful:

kono - this

sono - that

ano - that over there

dono - which

Ano tabemono ga takai.

That food is expensive.

Dono hon ga ii ka. (notice that you must use *ga* here)

Which book is good?

As a side note: technically, *dono* and *dore* are for asking questions for which there are at least **three** possible responses, or in other words, there are at least three items. There is a special way of asking when there are only two choices, and though you'll probably get the point across using *dono* and *dore*, try to avoid them in this case. And now for some advice:

Get a feel for Japanese sentences!

I would recommend writing several of these sentences on index cards (or on regular paper), carrying them around with you, and looking at them often. Just reading Japanese sentences helps give you a feel for how they work, and helps you to make your own sentences. Since the grammar is so "different", you need to expose yourself to it a lot, and get a feel for it, so you can become more comfortable with it. After you use Japanese sentences for a while, you will start to get an idea of how they should sound, and how to create your own.

What is the best way to practice in this area?

- **Grammar books** - This will help you learn the particles, and how to make sentences. The books usually have several example sentences, as well as a fair bit of vocabulary for you to can. I highly suggest checking out one of the textbooks on the [book recommendation](#) page.
- **Anime**- You will encounter countless real-world sentences which help you immensely. The only obstacle here is trying to pull words and sentences out of the sometimes speedy speech. Many people find anime to be very interesting, so you will probably have an easier time remembering the sentences. The same goes for Manga, if you can get your hands on some that's transliterated into Roman letters (as opposed to Japanese writing). If not, don't worry. I will address Japanese writing in an upcoming lesson..

Next Time

- A step back for a moment

You won't want to miss it.

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