

Lesson 26

Mr Oyama visits Mr Yamakawa at his home.

- 大山 ごめん下さい。
信子 あ、大山さん。お待ちしていました。どうぞ。
大山 おじゃまします。
信子 さ、どうぞこちらへ。
- 大山 来年の一月から三年の予定でサウジアラビアへ行くことになりました。
一 そうか。それで君一人で行くのかい。
大山 はい。最初の二、三ヶ月はまず私が一人で行って、その後で家族をよぶことにしました。
一 そうか、それがいいかもしれないな。君は前にも外国で仕事をしたことはあったね。
大山 はい、アジアの国には長期滞在したことがあります、中近東の国へはまだ行ったことはありません。
一 ところで、アラビア語は少しは出来るのか。
大山 この話はだいぶ前からありましたから勉強を始めたことは始めたのですが…。まあ、話すことは何とか少しは出来ますが、読んだり、書いたりするのはまだまだです。
一 それは大変だな。
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Comment

When Mr Ōyama arrives at the house he is greeted at the door by Mr Yamakawa's wife. All Japanese houses, and most apartments, have a space at the front door known as the 玄関 (げんかん) where the necessary formalities of greeting and saying farewells can be carried out. During this first exchange, Mr Ōyama is probably still standing at the entrance, preparing to take off his shoes. Normally there will be a step up into the house and the wife would be kneeling down on the wooden floor of the house proper, putting out the house slippers that are always provided for guests. You should try and memorise all these

phrases, because they are very useful.

Once the men settle down for a chat, their relationship becomes a little clearer. You will notice that Ōyama uses the polite *～ます* form, whereas Mr Yamakawa does not. This tells you that Ōyama is probably junior to Yamakawa in the company; but if he were working directly under Yamakawa, it is likely that his language would be more formal still. You still cannot be a hundred per cent certain of their exact relationship.

26.1 'Please excuse me'

ごめん下さい。

This phrase literally means 'may I receive your indulgence', *めん* meaning 'indulgence' or 'exemption'. *ご* (御) is similar to *お* in that it is prefixed to nouns and signifies politeness. Generally speaking *ご* is used when the characters are being pronounced in their *on* reading; *お* when the *kun* reading is being used. 酒 'alcoholic drink', for example, takes *お* when read *さけ*, but *ご* when pronounced *しゅ*. You have also met combinations such as *お金* and *お寺*. This 'rule', however, has many common exceptions: you have already come across a word like *お電話*, where the expected **ご電話* does *not* occur. You will have to learn each case as and when you meet it.

26.2 Humble verbs

お待ちしていました。
おじゃまします。

In 25.8 we touched on the subject of levels of speech. Here is another example. We can tell that the sentence is *polite* because it ends in *～ました*, but it also

contains an example of honorific language. Honorific language either works by raising the status of the subject of the verb, in which case we call it respect, or by lowering the status of the subject of the verb, in which case we call it humble. The previous lesson had the example of *いらっしゃる*, which was an example of respect being shown for the subject, *Ōyama-san*. Here we have the opposite, two humble constructions: 'We have been waiting for you' and 'I am about to interfere.' There are a number of ways of producing a humble form, but this is the simplest: prefix *お* + conjunctive form + *する*.

メッセージは確かにお伝えしました。

I definitely passed on the message.

あの本はもう先生にお返ししました。

I have already returned that book to the teacher.

You may be surprised to see *お* being used in a humble construction, but these statements always involve another person to some extent. The *お* is present in order to show an element of respect to that other person. Look, for instance, at the following sentence:

あの本はもう先生にお返しした。

I have already returned that book to the teacher.

Here there is no politeness expressed between speaker and hearer, perhaps because they are close friends, but the verb *お返しした* both humbles its subject (the student speaking) and expresses respect to the teacher by means of *お*.

26.3 Uses of *こと*

サウジアラビアへ行くことになりました。

君は前にも外国で仕事をしたことはあったね。

アジアの国には長期滞在したことがあります。

中近東の国へはまだ行ったことがありません。

We have seen how の can be used to transform a verb or clause into a noun. こと has a similar function. This process is known by the general term nominalisation, although in this course the word nominalisation is being used in a somewhat more restricted sense (see 22.5). In the following expressions, the use of こと is obligatory. Note how you can in fact analyse these sentences in two ways. 外国で仕事をしたことはあった could be seen as 'the working abroad has existed' or 'the fact that X has worked abroad has existed', depending on whether you wish to see こと as a kind of empty word that has a nominalising function, or as an abstract noun in its own right meaning 'fact', 'activity' or 'behaviour'.

26.4 Verb in citation form + ことになる

三年の予定でサウジアラビアへ行くことになりました。

This pattern means 'It has been decided that...' or 'It has been arranged that...'; its use implies that you had little or nothing to do with making the decision.

今度出張で九州に行くことになりました。

It has now been decided that I will go to Kyūshū on business.

その仕事は島田さんが担当することになりました。

It has been decided that Mr Shimada will be in charge of that job.

26.5 Verb in citation form + ことにする

その後で家族をよぶことにしました。

This pattern means 'to decide to...' and implies that the subject has made a conscious decision to do something.

これからは毎日軽い運動をすることにします。
I've decided to exercise a little every day from now on.
あの人とはもう話をしないことにしました。
I have decided not to talk to that person any more.

26.6 ことがある

アジアの国には長期滞在したことがありますが、
中近東の国へはまだ行ったことがありません。

The phrase ことがある, literally 'there exists a matter', is used in the following ways:

(a) When the verb preceding こと is in the perfective form as here, the phrase means 'doing X happened', i.e. 'one has had the experience of...'

日本語で小説を読んだことがありますか。
Have you ever read a novel in Japanese?
生れてから雪を見たことがない子供が世界には案外たくさんいます。
There is a surprisingly large number of children in this world who have never seen snow in their life.

(b) When the verb preceding こと is in the imperfective form the phrase means 'doing X does happen', i.e. 'there are times when'.

この時計は時々進むことがあります。
There are times when this watch runs fast.
このごろとても忙しいので夜八時過ぎまで会社にいることがよくあります。
These days I am so busy that there are many times when I stay at the office until after eight.

26.7 ことが出来る

アラビア語は少しは出来るのか。
話すことは何とか少しは出来ますが

In the first of these examples, the 出来る is short for 話すことが出来る, which makes its full appearance in the second example. が has changed to は at this point because we are dealing with a contrast leading up to the hesitant 'yes, but' at the end. This pattern means 'to be able to...' Here again, こと nominalises the clause that precedes it. Study the following examples:

彼は優秀な科学者だが、自分の研究を平易な言葉で説明することが出来ない。

He is an outstanding scientist but cannot explain his research simply.

御意見はよく分りましたが残念ながら賛成することは出来ません。

I understood your opinion perfectly well but I regret to say that I cannot agree with you.

26.8 Verb + ことは + verb

勉強を始めたことは始めたのですが

As a follow-on from 26.6 above, we also have a fully-fledged example here of the hesitant 'Well, it *does*..., but' or 'Well, I *have*..., but'.

もう昼ごはんは食べましたか。

Have you already had lunch?

ええ、食べたことは食べたのですが、まだおなかがすいています。

Well yes, I *have had* lunch, but I'm still hungry.

この本はもう読みましたか。

Have you read this book?

はい、読んだことは読みましたが、あまりよく分かりませんでした。
Well yes, I *have read* the book, but I didn't really understand it.

26.9 The particle で

最初の二、三ヶ月はまず私が一人で行って、

We have met で meaning 'by means of'. With words denoting people, で is used to express 'by' as in:

せんたく'そうじは全部自分でします。

Washing and cleaning, I do it all by myself.

フランスまでは妹と行きます。そしてそこからエジンバラへは一人で行きます。

I will go as far as France with my younger sister. And then from there I will go on to Edinburgh by myself.

By implication, this use of で tends to exclude other people:

この仕事は母と私とでします。

lit. As for this work, my mother and I will do it (and need no other help).

Key to conversation

Romanisation

Ôyama Gomen kudasai.

Nobuko A, Ôyama-san. O-machi shite imashita. Dōzo.

Ôyama O-jama shimasu.

Nobuko Sā, dōzo kochira e.

Ôyama Rainen no ichigatsu kara sannen no yotei de Sauji Arabia e iku koto ni

narimashita.

Hajime Sō ka. Sore de kimi hitori de iku no kai.

Ōyama Hai. Saisho no ni-sankagetsu wa mazu watakushi ga hitori de itte, sono ato de kazoku o yobu koto ni shimashita.

Hajime Sō ka, sore ga ii ka mo shirenai na. Kimi wa mae ni mo gaikoku de shigoto o shita koto wa atta ne.

Ōyama Hai, Ajia no kuni ni wa chōki taizai shita koto ga arimasu ga, chūkintō no kuni e wa mada itta koto ga arimasen.

Hajime Tokoro de, Arabiigo wa sukoshi wa dekiru no ka.

Ōyama Kono hanashi wa daibu mae kara arimashita kara benkyō o hajimeta koto wa hajimeta no desu ga... Mā, hanasu koto wa nan to ka sukoshi wa dekimasu ga, yondari, kaitari suru no wa mada mada desu.

Hajime Sore wa taihen da na.

Translation

Ōyama May I come in?

Nobuko Oh, Mr Ōyama. We've been looking forward to your visit. Please come in.

Ōyama Sorry to disturb you.

Nobuko Please, this way.

Ōyama It's been decided that I'll go to Saudi Arabia for three years from January next year.

Hajime Really? So, are you going alone?

Ōyama Yes. I've decided that I'll go by myself for the first two or three months, and then I'll bring my family over.

Hajime I see, that sounds like a good idea. You've worked abroad before haven't you?

Ōyama Yes, I've had long postings in Asian countries, but I've never been to a Middle Eastern country before.

Hajime Can you understand a bit of Arabic?

Ōyama I've known about this for quite a while, so I have at least *begun* studying / Well, somehow or other I can get by in speaking; but reading and writing, not yet.

Hajime What a chore!
