Lesson 11

John visits Yamakawa's younger brother Minoru in Kyōto. They meet each other in front of Kyōto University.

ジョン	失礼ですが、山川正さんの弟さんの実さんですか。
実	はい、山川実です。
ジョン	始めまして、ジョン・スミスです。どうぞよろしく。
実	始めまして、こちらこそどうぞよろしく。京都は初めて ですか。
ジョン	そうです。古い町ですね。
実	そうですね。でも新しいビル'アパートもたくさん ありますよ。
ジョン	実さんの家はどこですか。
実	私の下宿まではここから車で二十分ぐらいかかります。
ジョン	実さんの車はこれですか。
実	いいえ、私のはあの赤いのです。
ジョン	ずいぶん大きな車ですね。
実	ジョンさんのはどんな車ですか。
ジョン	私のはとても小さい車です。
実	何色ですか。
ジョン	青です。

11.1 'Excuse me...'

失礼ですが

You have already met 失礼 in 5.11 and 6.7. This is just another polite way of interrupting someone or catching their attention.

11.2 Descriptive verbs

> (京都は)古い町ですね。

There is a temptation to assume that because the word 'old' in the English sentence 'Kyōto is an old town' is an adjective, its Japanese counterpart here, 古い, is also an adjective; but this temptation should be resisted. It is in fact a kind of verb and inflects accordingly: 古い means 'is old' and so 古い町 is literally 'a town which is old'. As explained in 2.1, modifiers precede the noun. You should have no difficulty distinguishing these verbs from other verbs because they all end in the vowel い. We shall call them 'descriptive verbs'. Study the following examples:

新しいビル	new building
赤い車	red car
高い山	high mountain
高いコンピューター	expensive computer
安い時計	cheap watch
大きいつくえ	large desk
大きな川	large river
小さいかぎ	small key

Note that the descriptive verbs 大きい and 小さい sometimes become 大きな and 小さな when they are used in the noun-modifying position as seen above (see 13.1 for further details).

11.3 の as a noun substitute, 'the one'

> 実さんの車はこれですか。
> 私のはあの赤いのです。

In Japanese, just as in English, it is common practice to avoid constant repetition of nouns; the particle の can be used in such cases as a substitute. Look at the following example:

木村:　　　これは和子さんの車ですか。

Kimura:　　Is this car yours, Kazuko?

和子:　　　いいえ、それは正さんのです。あの古いのが私のです。

Kazuko:　　No, that is Tadashi's. The old one over there is mine.

First make sure you understand the difference between the use of の as a possessive here (in 和子さんの車 'Kazuko's car') and as a noun substitute (in あの古いのが 'that old one'). But then what about the use of の in 正さんのです and 私のです? This usage has already been touched on in 2.1, where it was explained that the second noun (here 車) has been omitted. 古い, being a descriptive verb, can modify the nominal の directly, but 正さん and 私, being nouns, cannot; they need an 'extra' の to be able to act as modifier. Hence 正さんのです can be analyzed as 正さんの (の) です, where the first の is possessive ('Tadashi's') and the second, which always drops, is the noun substitute ('one').

11.4　Colours

あの赤いのです。
何色ですか。青です。

Colour terms, as we have seen above, are often found as descriptive verbs but many also often have a nominal equivalent.

verb	*nominal*	*meaning*
青い	青 (あお)	blue
赤い	赤 (あか)	red
白い	白 (しろ)	white

黒い	黒 (くろ)	black
黄色い	黄色 (きいろ)	yellow
茶色い	茶色 (ち゛いろ)	brown

These nominal equivalents must be used in the following cases:

(a) When the colour itself is actually named.

山下さんの自動車は何色ですか。

What colour is Yamashita's car?

黒です。

Black.

(b) When one colour is itself modified.

うすい青のびんせん

light-blue letter-paper

こい赤のセーター

dark-red jersey

By no means all colours, however, can be found in this group of descriptive verb/noun sets. Many others appear purely in the form of nouns and they are of two main types:

(c) those that must be formed in conjunction with the word 色 (いろ)

灰 (はい)	ash	灰色	grey	灰色の空	a grey sky
桃 (もも)	peach	桃色	pink	桃色の花	a pink flower
水 (みず)	water	水色	light blue	水色のシャツ	light-blue shirt

(d) those that may have the word 色 omitted.

紫 (むらさき)	purple	むらさきの着物	a purple kimono
紺 (こん)	dark blue	こんの制服	dark-blue uniform
緑 (みどり)	green	緑の山	green mountain
茶 (ちゃ)	brown	茶のくつ	brown shoes

11.5　'What colour?'

> 何色ですか。

Note that the word 何色 is pronounced なにいろ in this particular context, where it means 'what colour?' As a general rule, the character 何 followed by another noun is pronounced なに. Only when combined with a numerical classifier or a suffix denoting time, date etc. (see 9.1), is it pronounced なん. For example:

> 何人　read　なんにん　means 'how many people?'
>
> 何人　read　なにじん　means 'which nationality?'
>
> 何色　read　なんしょく　means 'how many colours?'
>
> 何色　read　なにいろ　means 'what colour?'

11.6　Adverbial modifiers (1)

> ずいぶん大きな車ですね。
> 私のはとても小さい車です。

There is a class of Japanese words which operates much in the same fashion as adverbs in English. Three are introduced here because they are often used to modify descriptive verbs: とても 'very', ずいぶん 'very' and だいぶ 'fairly'. See 15.2 for further uses of these.

> これはとてもおいしいお酒ですね。
>
> This is a very tasty sake, isn't it!
>
> ずいぶん長い小説ですね。
>
> This is a fairly long novel, isn't it!

だいぶ古いビルですね。

This is a fairly old building, isn't it!

11.7 どんな

ジョンさんのはどんな車ですか。

どんな means 'what kind?' It is another form of prenoun, in that it can be linked to nouns without an intervening particle. Other words in the same set, such as こんな, そんな and あんな, will be introduced in due course.

Key to conversation

Romanisation

Jon	Shitsurei desu ga, Yamakawa Tadashi san no otōto-san no Minoru-san desu ka.
Minoru	Hai, Yamakawa Minoru desu.
Jon	Hajimemashite, Jon Sumisu desu. Dōzo yoroshiku.
Minoru	Hajimemashite. Kochira koso dōzo yoroshiku. Kyōto wa hajimete desu ka.
Jon	Sō desu. Furui machi desu ne.
Minoru	Sō desu ne. Demo atarashii biru ya apāto mo takusan arimasu yo.
Jon	Minoru-san no ie wa doko desu ka.
Minoru	Watakushi no geshuku made wa koko kara kuruma de nijuppun gurai kakarimasu.
Jon	Minoru-san no kuruma wa kore desu ka.
Minoru	Iie, watashi no wa ano akai no desu.
Jon	Zuibun ōki na kuruma desu ne.
Minoru	Jon-san no wa donna kuruma desu ka.
Jon	Watakushi no wa totemo chiisai kuruma desu.
Minoru	Nani iro desu ka.
Jon	Ao desu.

Translation

John	Excuse me, are you Yamakawa Tadashi's younger brother Minoru?
Minoru	Yes, I'm Yamakawa Minoru.
John	How do you do? I'm John Smith. Pleased to meet you.
Minoru	How do you do? Pleased to meet you too. Is this your first time in Kyoto?
John	That's right. It's an old city isn't it?
Minoru	Yes, it is. But there are a lot of new buildings and apartments too you know.
John	Where do you live?
Minoru	It takes about twenty minutes to get to my lodgings from here by car.
John	Is this your car here?
Minoru	No, mine is that red one.
John	It's a pretty big car isn't it!
Minoru	What about yours?
John	Mine is a very small car.
Minoru	What colour is it?
John	Blue.