

***Doo sureba yoroshii-deshoo*—Asking for instructions**

When Mr. Lerner was talking with Mr. Mori, the director of the company, Miss Yoshida came in and asked Mr. Mori for instructions about how to type a part of his letter. She said

Koko-wa doo uteba yoroshii-deshoo.
(How should I type this?)

and Mr. Mori answered, while writing it out on a piece of paper

Koo-yuu fuu-ni utte-kureru-to ii-gane.
(Would you type it this way?)

While listening to this exchange, Mr. Lerner wondered if he had been using the right expressions when asking for directions; he usually said ... *shinakereba narimasen-ka* (Must I...?)

Using ... *nakereba narimasen-ka*, as in *Doo utanakereba narimasen-ka*, can be understood, but it is not common in social situations. Answering a question with this form, as in *Koo utanakereba narimasen*, is also uncommon in actual life; it is classroom Japanese.

Among several expressions used for asking for instructions, *doo sureba ii-deshoo* (more politely, ... *yoroshii-deshoo*) sounds the most humble because it implies that the speaker is interested in knowing what is the right way to do something. For instance, when you come across a kanji compound you do not know how to read, it is most appropriate to say

Kore-wa doo yomeba ii-deshoo.

これは どう 読めば いいでしょう。
(How should I read this?)

The ... *sureba ii-deshoo* form is also used when asking someone's wishes politely, as in

Doko-e ukagaeba yoroshii-deshoo.

(Where would you like me to come?)

Nanji-ni omochi-sureba yoroshii-deshoo.

(When would you like me to bring it?)

To mean "How should I do this?", the following expressions should be avoided in social situations because they sound like classroom speech.

Doo shinakereba narimasen-ka.

Doo suru-beki-desu-ka.

Yomikata-wa nan-desu-ka.

Saying *Doo shimasu-ka* is all right and *Doo suru-n-desu-ka* is also acceptable, but these are not as humble as *Doo sureba ii-deshoo*.

Some words used for counting things

When he met Miss Yoshida on Monday morning, Mr. Lerner wanted to tell her that he had seen a couple of movies over the weekend. He said

Shuumatsu-ni nihon-no eega-o mimashita.

meaning "I saw two movies over the weekend." Miss Yoshida looked rather surprised and said something admiring. After further discussion he realized that she thought that he had seen Japanese movies. Everybody at the office was amused at this misunderstanding — namely taking *nihon-no* (two) for *nihon-no* (Japanese). *

This misunderstanding was caused by two things. One was a mistake in accent. To mean "two movies" he should have said

ni ho n no 二本の

instead of saying

ho n no 本の
ni

The latter accent pattern is used for the word *nihon-no* (of Japan), as in *nihon-no hana* (Japanese flowers) and *nihon-no josee* (Japanese women).

The other reason concerns the use of *nihon*. The counter *hon* is used for counting long, thin objects like needles, pencils, pillars and cigarettes. It is also used for films and tapes because they are long and thin. Mr. Lerner was right in using *hon* for counting movies, but he should have said

Eega-o nihon mimashita.

rather than

Nihon-no eega-o mimashita.

It is more common in conversation to say the number after the name of the thing. Thus *nisatsu-no hon* (two books) will be understood but it is more conversational to say

Hon-o nisatsu yomimashita.

In the same way, it is more common to say things like

Okane-o sen-en haraimashita.
(I paid 1,000 yen.)

Kochii-o nihai nomimashita.
(I drank two cups of coffee.)

Negi-o sanbon kudasai.
(Please give me three negi — Japanese leek.)

than saying *sen-en-no okane*, *nihai-no kochii* or *sanbon-no negi*.