



... *n-ja nai-deshoo-ka* meaning  
'it seems to me ...'

Mr. Mori, the director of the company, showed a plan submitted by a colleague of Mr. Lerner and Mr. Takada and asked them their opinion of it. Mr. Lerner glanced through the plan and was going to say

*Taihen ii-to omoimasu.*  
(I think it is very good.)

when Mr. Takada said

*Nakanaka ii-n-ja nai-deshoo-ka.*  
なかなか いいんじゃ ないでしょうか。

Mr. Lerner understood that Mr. Takada also approved of the plan, but he wondered what implication ... *n-ja nai-deshoo-ka* has in this case.

... *n-ja nai-deshoo-ka* shows the speaker's reserve in expressing his opinion. For instance,

*ii-n-ja nai-deshoo-ka.*

means 'I should think it is good.' It does not mean 'it is not good.' In the same way

*iku-n-ja nai-deshoo-ka.*  
行くんじゃ ないでしょうか。

means 'It seems to me that he is going to go.'  
Thus, ... *n-ja nai-deshoo-ka* can be replaced by ... *to omoimasu* as far as the substantial meaning of the statement is concerned, as in

*ii-to omoimasu.*

*ii -n-ja nai-deshoo-ka.*

although ... *n-ja nai-deshoo-ka* sounds more reserved.

When preceded by nouns and noun-like adjectives (*na* adjectives), ... *nan-ja nai-deshoo-ka* is used as in

*Kore, Yamada-san-no nimotsu-nan-ja nai-deshoo-ka.*

(This might be Mr. Yamada's luggage.)

*Ano-hito, byooki-nan-ja nai-deshoo-ka.*

あの人、病氣なんじゃ ないでしょうか。

(I'm afraid he is sick.)

In this type of sentence, the *da* of ... *dato omoimasu* changes to *na* as in

... *byooki -da-to omoimasu.*

... *byooki -nan-ja nai-deshoo-ka.*

## ... *n-desu-ga* used for making a request

Mr. Lerner was looking at some watches in a department store yesterday when a young woman chose a watch and handed it to the salesman, saying

Ano, okurimono-nan-desu-ga...  
 あの、おくりものなんですか.....  
 (lit. This is a present, but...)

and the salesman said *Kashikomarimashita* (Certainly). Mr. Lerner wondered if *Okurimono-desu* can also be said in this case.

\* \* \*

The young woman could have simply said *Okurimono-desu* (It is a present) or *Okurimono-ni shite-kudasai* (Fix it like a present), too. But the ending ...*n-desu-ga* is a common expression of request; by adding ...*n-desu-ga* she implied "...so please wrap it so that it can be used as a present." ...*n-desu-ga* is used as in

*Iso-gu-n-desu-ga*...  
 (I am in a hurry — "please come tomorrow — "could you let me do it some other time?" implied.)

*Ashita korarenai-n-desu-ga*...  
 (I can't come tomorrow — "could you let me do it some other time?" implied.)

While simply saying *Okurimono-desu*, *Iso-gimasu* or *Ashita koraremasen* is just stating a fact or condition, saying ...*n-desu-ga* implies "so please act accordingly." (In the case of nouns and *-na* adjectives, *nan-desu-ga* is used instead of ...*n-*

*desu-ga*.)

Since ...*n-desu-ga* implies that one wants the other person to act in accordance with one's wishes, it can sound rather demanding depending on the situation. If you said *Iso-gu-n-desu-ga*... in a definite tone, it might sound as if you were self-centered. Therefore it is best to start the sentence with *anoo*... or *sumimasen* to imply your hesitation about troubling the other person, as in

Anoo... *Iso-gu-n-desu-ga*...  
 あのおう.....いそぐんですけど.....  
 (Excuse me. I'm in rather a hurry.)  
*Sumimasen. Ashita korarenai-n-desu-ga*...  
 (I'm sorry. I can't come tomorrow.)

## Yaru and ageru meaning 'to give'

Mr. Lerner visited the Takadas' last Saturday. When he arrived, one of their neighbors, Mrs. Matsumoto, was about to leave. He heard her say

Sorosoro akachan-ni miruku-o ageru jikan-desu-kara. ...

(It is about time to feed the baby.)

After she left, Mr. Takada said she should have used *yeru* instead of *ageru* (to give), but Mrs. Takada was in favor of *ageru*.

It is generally explained that *ageru* is used when giving something to one's equals and superiors and *yeru* when giving something to one's inferiors, but there are other factors involved in deciding which one to use. One has to consider not only to whom one gives something but also with whom one is talking about the action of giving.

To refer to giving something to one's family members when speaking with them, one can use either *ageru*, or *yeru*; men usually use *yeru* while women prefer *ageru*, as in

Men: Kore *yeru-yo*. これ やるよ。  
(I'll give it to you.)

Women: Kore *ageru-wa*. これ あげるわ。  
(I'll give it to you.)

But when reporting one's giving something to one's family members in conversation with non-family members or acquaintances, it is traditionally regarded as correct to use *yeru* regardless of the

relation between the speaker and the family member to whom he has given something. Thus,

Kodomo-ni *yerimashita*.

子どもに やりました。

(I gave it to my child.)

Haha-ni *yerimashita*. (I gave it to my mother.)

In this case women also should use *yeru*.

This is based on the idea that one should identify oneself with one's family members when talking with someone politely, and one's own family members should be regarded as inferior to the listener. Therefore saying

akachan-ni *miruku-o ageru*

is not appropriate because it sounds like one is giving something to someone else's baby. (The word *akachan* is used to refer to someone else's baby, while *akanboo* is used to refer to one's own baby; thus Mrs. Matsumoto's choice of words sounded even stranger to Mr. Takada, who follows the traditional ideas of polite speech.)

Nowadays this custom seems to be changing; many young mothers use *ageru* when referring to giving something to their children. Either consciously or unconsciously, they have begun to stop making a distinction between expressions used directly to their family members and those used when talking with non-family members.

### ... (suru)to ii used as a reserved expression of advice

Mr. Lerner had to call on someone at his office for business discussions yesterday afternoon. When he was checking its location on the map, Mr. Takada said

*Chikatetsu-de iku-to ii-desu-yo.*

地下鉄で 行くと いいですよ。

(Why don't you take the subway? — *lit.* It will be good to take the subway.)

Mr. Lerner thanked him and left. While walking to the subway station, he wondered how the expression *iku-to ii* (*lit.* it is good if one goes) compares with *itta hoo-ga ii* (you had better go) and *ittara doo-desu-ka* (how about going?). \*

The expression ... *ta hoo-ga ii* is used to advise someone to take a certain action, as in

*Ame-ga furisoo-da-kara, kasa-o motte-itta hoo-ga ii-desu-yo.*

(Since it looks like it's going to rain, you had better take an umbrella with you.)

*Ano-hito-wa okorippoi-kara, ki-o tsuketa hoo-ga ii-yo.*

(As he gets angry easily, you had better be careful.)

Since ... *ta hoo-ga ii* sounds positive, it can sound too pushy in social situations. ... *tara doo/ikaga-desu-ka* is less forceful than ... *ta hoo-ga ii*, but it still sounds positive and enthusiastic:

*Sukoshi yasundara doo-desu-ka.*

(Why don't you take a rest?)

*Sukoshi oyasumi-ni nattara ikaga-desu-ka.*

(Why don't you take a rest? — more polite)

On the other hand, the dictionary form of a verb plus *to ii* is used to advise someone by way of proposing an effective method rather than by urging one to do something as in

*Kore-o tsukau-to ii-desu-yo.*

(*lit.* It will be good to use this.)

*Kasa-o motte-iku-to ii-yo.*

かさを もっていくと いいよ。

(*lit.* It'll help to take an umbrella with you.)

Thus this expression sounds less positive and more reserved than the other two.

## Ippiki and ippon (one fish and bar)

Mr. Lerner wanted to cook some fish for himself, and stopped by at the fishmonger's near his house. He asked the fishmonger, pointing to a heap of mackerel pike,

Sono sanma, *ippiki kudasai.*

そのさんま、いっぴき ください。

(Please give me one of those mackerel pike.)

He was rather proud of himself for remembering that fish should be counted with *hiki* instead of *hitotsu* (one piece), but the middle-aged fishmonger said

Hai, *sanma ippon.* はい、さんま いっほん。  
(*Iit.* OK, one bar of mackerel pike.)

\* \* \*  
Animals are usually counted with *hiki* as in

*ippiki, nihiki, sanbiki, yonhiki, gohiki, roppiki...*

*Hiki* undergoes phonetic change into *piki* or *biki* depending on what precedes it. This counter is applied to all types of animals — quadrupeds, insects and reptiles, although birds are counted with *wa* as in *ichiwa, niwa, sanba*, and big animals are often counted with *too*.

The counter *hon* used by the fishmonger is for counting thin, long things such as pencils, poles, bottles and cassette tapes. *Hon* also undergoes phonetic changes as in

*ippon, nihon, sanbon, yonhon, gohon, roppon...*

The fishmonger used *hon* because he regarded his merchandise as a lifeless object; he avoided using *hiki*, which should be used, strictly speaking, for living animals.

In the same way, while living human beings are counted with *ri* or *nin* as in

*hitori, futari, sannin, yonin, gonin, rokunin...*

dead persons are counted *ittai* (one body), *nitai* (two bodies), etc.

Counters are used depending on how the person, animal or object is regarded in the situation. When one counts the number of sheets used for a letter, for instance, one says

*Sanmai-no nagai tegami-deshita.*

(It was a long letter on three sheets of paper.)

But when one counts a letter as a unit of correspondence, one uses *tsuu* as in

*Kyoo-wa tegami-o santsuu kaite.*

(I wrote three letters today.)

## ... de vs. ... ni meaning 'in/at, etc.'

Mr. Lerner still sometimes makes mistakes in the use of *de* and *ni*. Today he inadvertently said

*Ano-hito-wa doko-de tsutomete-imasu-ka.*  
(Where does he work?)

and Miss Yoshida corrected him saying that he should use *ni* with *tsutomeru*. He wondered what verbs, besides *iru* (to be) and *aru* (to be), are used with *ni* instead of *de*.

\* \* \*

As a rule, *ni* is used with verbs indicating existence while *de* is used with verbs indicating action, as in

*Yamada-san-wa doko-ni imasu-ka.*

(Where is Mr. Yamada?)

*Asoko-ni ginkoo-ga arimasu-ne.*

(There is a bank over there.)

*Mainichi kaisha-de hatarakimasu.*

毎日 会社で はたらきます。

(I work at my company every day.)

*Uchi-de nomu kochii-no hoo-ga oishii.*

(The coffee I drink at home tastes better.)

There are several other verbs commonly used to indicate existence, in addition to *iru* and *aru*, such as *sumu* (to live), *tomaru* (to stay overnight) and *tsutomeru* (to work for).

*Doko-ni sunde-imasu-ka.* (Where does he live?)

*Ano hoteru-ni tomarimashita.*

(I stayed at that hotel.)

*Kyonen-kara kono kaisha-ni tsutomete-imasu.*

去年から この 会社に つとめています。

(I have been working for this company since last year.)

These verbs refer to human beings (and other living things in the case of *sumu*) staying at a certain place without moving around. The verb *sumu* refers to being settled in a certain place; in this sense, it is different from the English verb "live," which also refers to acting as a living creature. *Tsutomeru* emphasize one's state as a member of a company rather than actually working. *Tomaru* in *hoteru-ni tomaru* refers to staying at a certain place, just like *sumu*.

Actually *tomaru* can be used either with *ni* or *de*; when it is used to mean "to stop moving," *de* is used.

(1) *Asoko-ni kuruma-ga tomatte-imasu.*

(There is a car stopped over there.)

(2) *Asoko-de kuruma-ga tomatte-imasu.*

(A car has stopped over there.)

are used in different situations. Namely, in (1) the speaker emphasizes the car being parked and staying still; in (2) the speaker emphasizes the car having suddenly stopped moving.

## ... eba ii-deshoo used to ask for instruction

When Mr. Lerner called a certain company to make an appointment with the director, a secretary asked him

*Onamae-wa doo kakeba yoroshii-deshoo.*  
(How do I write your name, please?)

She sounded very polite and pleasant. Mr. Lerner liked the expression . . . *eba yoroshii-deshoo* and wanted to use it himself, but wondered if it was too feminine.

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. . . *eba ii-deshoo* or *eba yoroshii-deshoo* (more polite) is used by both men and women to politely ask for instruction. This literally means "will it be good if I . . . ?" When asking for directions, for example, it is best to say

*Ekfe ikital-n-desu-ga, doo ikeba ii-deshoo.*

駅へ 行きたいんですが、どう 行けば いいでしょう。

(I want to go to the station. How do I go?)

To ask where to transfer, you can say

*Doko-de norikaereba ii-deshoo.*  
(Where do I change trains?)

To make an appointment, one often says

*Nanji-ni ukagaeba ii-deshoo.*  
何時に うかがえば いいでしょう。  
(What time should I come?)

*Doko-e ukagaeba ii-deshoo.*  
(Where should I come to meet you?)

When asking for instructions, a direct question using . . . *desu-ka* or . . . *masu-ka* may sound rather abrupt. For instance, when one has received a business card but is not sure how to read a name written in kanji (this often happens because some kanji can be read in various ways), it will sound abrupt to say something like

*Onamae-no yomikata-wa nan-desu-ka.*  
(What's the way to read your name?)

*Kono kanji-wa doo yominasu-ka.*  
(How do I read these kanji?)

It is best to say

*Onamae-wa doo oyomi-sureba ii-deshoo.*  
(How should I read your name, please?)

The . . . *eba ii* form is also used between friends to indicate reserve, although it will undergo a change into a familiar tone.

*Nanji-ni ikeba ii?* 何時に 行けば いい?

(What time shall I come?)

*Ikura haraeba ii-no.*

(How much should I pay?)