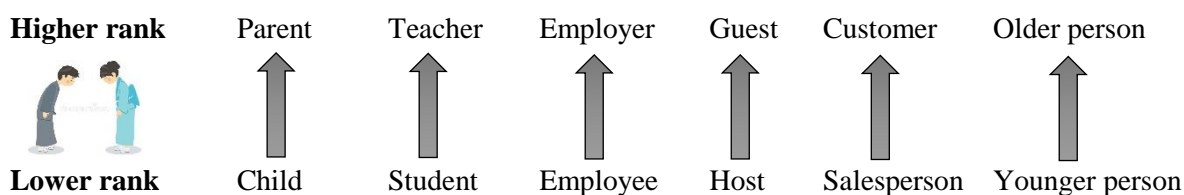


POLITENESS LEVELS & DAILY EXPRESSIONS

If there is one thing Japanese people are famous for around the world, it is their impeccable service and very reserved personalities, and this is due to one major element: politeness. It is not a cliché; it is everywhere and essential in their culture, but do you actually know how many levels there are?

Politeness levels

Depending on the relationship a Japanese person has with the person he/she is talking to, he/she adapts his/her language and tone. The Japanese culture- and Asian ones generally speaking- follows a rather strict hierarchy system, especially in the work place, and the politeness level they use depends on the rank they occupy in society. See below an example:



Normally, when close family members, friends and children address each other, they use informal language; it is called *くだけたにほんご* [kudaketa nihongo]. You will study this casual way of speaking later. As for business clients, strangers and people with higher social statuses, two levels should be used: *けいご* [keigo] and *ていねいご* [teineigo]. *けいご* often referred to as the “super-polite form” is always learnt last as not immediately essential to live in Japan- especially at a beginner’s level. A1 learners always start with *ていねいご*, which is enough to be formal and polite in all situations.

Japanese often do not expect foreigners to speak their language, furthermore, when you do, even if it is “broken” Japanese, and you mix up politeness levels, they do not blame you. On the contrary, they are happy with you trying. So do not worry!

Honorifics

Honorifics in Japanese are small words that are used after the name of someone to show esteem and respect. They are kind of the English equivalent of “Sir” and “Madam” but are more generalized and not only reserved to formal situations. In Japanese, people **never ever** call someone by their first name alone (only parents to their own children, or close friends to each other), they always add an honorific word behind.

Several honorifics exist but four are very commonly used, and they are the ones you should remember:

-さん [san] → it is the most common honorific as it can be used in both formal and informal situations, for both men and women. People will use it when they talk to you too.

ex: マリアさん (= Ms Maria) ; アンドリューさん (Mr Andrew)...

-さま [sama] → it is the more respectful version of さん. Japanese use it when talking to people of higher rank than themselves (in hotels, shops...).

ex: おきゃくさま (= Mr Customer)...

-くん [kun] → it is used by older people to younger ones, particularly to young men and young boys, but it can also be used for females. For example, kindergarten teachers talk to their 1-6 year-old children using くん all the time.

ex: ひろたかくん [Hiroataka kun]...

-ちゃん [chan] → it is used for babies, pets, close friends (especially for and between women), grandchildren, and lovers as there is this feeling of “cuteness” behind it. It is reserved to informal situations mainly.

ex: みあちゃん [Mia chan] ; ねこちゃん [Neko chan: a cat]...

🌟 Daily expressions

Daily life in Japan is very coded. They have expressions for almost every situation and they are systematic so you do not only need to get used to them but also to learn and employ them, otherwise you will be considered as rude.

How do they work?

Person A says an expression first (based on the situation) and Person B responds to it →

Person A	Person B	Situation
おはよう！ (informal)	おはようございます。 (formal)	Good morning
こんにちは [konnichiwa]	こんにちは [konnichiwa]	Hello
こばん [konbanwa]	こばん [konbanwa]	Good evening
さようなら (formal)	バイバイ (informal)	Goodbye
おやすみ (informal)	おやすみなさい。 (formal)	Good night
いってきます。	いってらっしゃい。	Leaving the house
ただいま	おかえりなさい (formal) おかえり (informal)	Coming back to the house
ありがとうございます。 (formal) ありがとう。 (informal)	どういたしまして。 (you're welcome)	Thanking someone
どうぞ。 (please)	どうも	Authorizing for something and thanking for allowing
どうぞ。 (please)	しつれいします。	Authorizing for something and apologizing for bothering
いただきます。 (I'll enjoy this!)	ごちそうさまでした。 (formal) ごちそうさま。 (informal) (Thank you for the meal)	Before and after the meal
いたい！ (ouch!)	すみません。	Getting hurt and apologizing!