

第2課 CHAPTER 2 PARTICLES

This section will give you a lot of information up front but please bear with it as the various usages of particles will be reinforced in subsequent chapters. Japanese grammar relies heavily on particles and conjugation (which you will learn about later). Particles are always written in hiragana and serve to break up a sentence into logical parts. Particles can tell you most of what you need to know about the sentence. They also make it easier to read Japanese by giving you a visual cue to break up the flow of the sentence since there are no spaces and Japanese people seldom use punctuation.

Subject markers

The subject of a sentence is marked by either particle は or が and while the hiragana は is normally pronounced “hah,” when it is being used as a particle it is pronounced “wah.” Particle が is always pronounced “gah” These two particles mark whatever appears before them as the subject of a sentence.

オーストラリアは ^{たの}楽しい ^{くに}国だ。
Subject は descriptor + object + verb
“Australia is a fun country.”

Many students get confused when they encounter は・が later on even toward the end of a sentence, but this is just like in English where there can be a clause that becomes the subject of an overall sentence which can sometimes be very simple.

ケーキを全部 ^{ぜんぶ}食べた ^{ひと}人はニッキーだった。
Cake + connector particle + whole thing + eat (v) person は Nicky + verb
The person who ate the whole [all of] the cake was Nicky.

Notice that the subject is the phrase: “the person who ate the whole cake.” People also sometimes get confused when both は and が appear in a sentence or when there are multiples of the same particle in the sentence, but remember that they still perform the same job.

げつようび わたし ^{しよくば}い
月曜日は ^{わたし}私は職場に行く。
Monday +は I+は workplace に will go.
[As for] Monday, I will go to work.

Notice that in this example, the two subjects are nested. The overall subject is Monday, and then the speaker is the subject of this sentence regarding Monday.

Understand that が differs from は only in that it puts extra emphasis on the subject and so can change the nuance or underlying meaning of a sentence. For example assume that you're a kid again and you've been told not to snack on cookies, but you've been caught with your hand in the cookie jar. You may recall as a kid arguing that your brother or sister did it first so it was okay. Obviously this does not excuse your snacking, but the idea is to somehow transfer blame onto your sibling. Now look at what you might say in Japanese:

おとうと さき た
でも、 弟 が先に食べたのよ。
But, little brother が before/already に ate !!
But, little brother ate [some] cookies just a moment ago!

Notice how the use of が instead of は could put lots of emphasis on the subject which is your little brother thus potentially distancing you from the truth which is that you were caught with your hand in the cookie jar. In this way, が is often used in comparisons to emphasize one thing over another as in the following scenario:

A customer at an electronics store asks a clerk which laptop the clerk would recommend to which the clerk replies これがいいです。 “This [is] good.” The clerk could have said これはいいです but the use of が emphasizes the laptop that the clerk points out to the customer giving the impression that **that** laptop is good (better) as compared to the rest.

Particle が can also be used like the conjunction “but” in English but unlike the other conjunctions which mean the same thing, が can be used in writing and in speech and transcends levels of speech.

た かね
ケーキを食べたいが、金がない。
Cake を want to eat が (but), money が (subject) not have
I want to eat cake but I have no money.

...But| Wait! The subject is often omitted whenever it can be reasonably inferred, but this will be discussed more in further sections.

→ には

Combining particles に and は into には simply combines the meanings of both particles.

わたし ごがく かんたん
私 には語学が簡単だ。
Me に(to/for) は learning languages が simple + is(v)

は marks the subject as the (short) phrase 私に which is the directional arrow pointing toward oneself. In English this could be said something like “to me” or “for me.” Thus the sentence means “to/for me, learning languages is easy.”

きんようび なに よてい
金曜日には何か予定あるの？
Friday には some kind of + plans +have(v) ?
Do you have any plans on Friday?

Here the は marks the subject as 金曜日に which means “on/at Friday,” thus this sentence could be read as “regarding on Friday, have [you] some kind of [any] plans?”

→ への vs. からの

The usual function of particle の is to connect two nouns (as you will soon learn). The directional particle provides the same nuance that it would have even without particle の.

けんじくんへのプレゼントだ。 “[It] is a present to/for Kenji”

Without the へ, the の would just connect “Kenji” (くん is just a suffix attached to names) to “present” so the sentence would mean “[It] is Kenji’s present.” While this may be clear in practice where there is context to provide clarity, in an example it is not clear whether it is a present that Kenji brought for someone else or if it is a present that someone brought for Kenji; however, the directional particle へ (に cannot be used with の in this way) points toward Kenji, so as written the sentence makes it clearer that the present is for Kenji.

てがみ
ペンパルへの手紙だ。 “[It] is [a] letter to/for [my] penpal.”
かのじょ
彼女へのラブレターだ。 “[It] is [a] love letter to/for her.”

Remember that へ is not used like “from” so in that case you might think you would use への but Japanese people do not like the sound of that combination so in such a case you would use からの。

がっこう し
学校からの知らせだ。 “[It] is [a] notice from school.”

Direct object particle

The particle を, as previously mentioned, connects an active verb to its object. It is only necessary for active (as opposed to passive) verbs or ones which express some kind of action being performed on or for an object.

すし た
寿司を食べる。 "eat sushi"

ともだち ま
友達を待つ。 "wait on a friend"

Be careful because sometimes the subject or the object or both can be omitted. Below, the が marks 友達 "friend" as the subject while the object (who the friend is waiting on) is omitted and must be inferred from context.

ともだち ま
友達が待っている。 "[my] friend is waiting."

The verb, by itself, could be a valid sentence in Japanese if the subject and object can reasonably be assumed:

ま
待っている。 "waiting"

The true sentence in this example could be something like:

ともだち わたし ま
友達が私を待っている。 "[My] friend is waiting on me."

Below is an example of a passive verb which has no object that it acts on. "Room" is the subject of the sentence so it could be translated literally as: "as for the room, [it] is empty." In other words, the verb which means "to be empty or vacant" does not relate an action being performed upon the room, but rather describes the room.

へや あ
部屋が開いていた。 "[The] room is empty."

Conversely, the verb 捨てる meaning "to throw away" operates in the following example on the object ごみ meaning "trash."

す
ごみを捨てる。 "Throw away [the] trash."

Question markers

These are particles but they act like the English question mark. Either か or かい can be placed at the end of a sentence just before the period to turn a sentence into a question.

ばん はん た
晩 ご飯 を食べたか。 "Did [you] eat dinner?"

The difference is that かい is more casual (a lower level of speech) than か so it can only be used toward one's social/hierarchical equals and inferiors. While かい carries a tone of familiarity with the other person it can also often be considered cutesy and is hence often used by grandparents when speaking to their grandchildren or by mothers speaking to their children or between close friends.

Particle の can be fused in front of these to create のか and のかい. These combinations carry a strong accusatory connotation especially if the speaker's tone is also serious.

わ
分かったのか The verb for "understand" + のか

What could have been simply "did you understand" becomes a curt "you got it didn't you!?" with an underlying expectation that because whatever the two parties are talking about is (at least to the speaker) so obvious, the other person *should* have understood it. This sort of speech is often used by bosses to subordinates and is generally not to be used toward someone of equal or higher social value unless that person is a family member (although sometimes not even then if the family is very strict).

Particle の can also serve as a replacement for か or かい to turn a sentence into a question in plain-form and even lower levels of speech.

ばん はん た
晩 ご飯 を食べたの。 "Did [you] eat dinner?"

Use of の signifies a lower level of speech than か or かい and exudes a strong sense of familiarity thus it is actually rather welcoming among friends and other people of equal standing or within the home. For this same reason it is inappropriate to use toward people of higher standing and toward people below one's own level unless one wants to treat that person in a familiar way (like when addressing a younger sibling). The sibling is of a lower rank because they are younger but as they are family the strong familiarity of の would not be awkward.

の can also be combined with the verb だ (or です in lesser-polite form) which means "is" to form のだ or のです. The の treats everything that comes before it like a giant compound noun which is followed by either だ or です. The result is a statement which sounds a bit like an explanation.

しごと
仕事がある。 “[I] have work.” vs.
しごと
仕事があるのだ。 “[It is because I] have work.”

The part before the の is a simple sentence in and of itself which is then taken to become a noun phrase and の implies some kind of relation to the verb “is.” The practical significance of のだ is clearer in an actual conversation. For example, pretend that a guy’s girlfriend wants him to take her on a trip through the countryside to which he replies with the above statement. While he is literally saying simply that he has work, there is an implication that *because* he has work he cannot take her on a trip.

...But| Wait! のだ/のです can be contracted into んだ and んです which work in exactly the same way but are in some cases easier to pronounce depending on the flow of the sentence.

Connecting nouns

Particle の can also serve to connect multiple nouns and to signal a relationship between those nouns. One can infer what the relationship between the nouns is based on the choice of nouns and surrounding context. In many cases the relationship is one of possession/ownership:

わたし くるま
私 の 車 me+の+car = “my car”

There are cases; however, where the relationship is of a different nature. The person in the example below is obviously not owned by illness, rather in cases like this Japanese people will infer that the first noun is clarifying or qualifying the second noun.

びょうき ひと
病 気 の 人 sick+の+person/people = sick person/people

Emphasizing connection with the group

↳ よ

Just like particles *か* and *かい*, particle *よ* comes at the end of the sentence just before the period. The following example is something a mother might shout to her children. The *よ* emphasizes the connection between the speaker (the mother) and the listeners (her children) creating the nuance that she made the food (at least partially) for them so they should come and eat.

はん
ご飯ができたよ。 Rice/meal が ready+よ = “[The] meal is ready [so come eat]!!”

よ can also, in some cases, soften a statement that might otherwise be considered harsh such as:

ちが
それは違う。 “That is different/false.”

This is how Japanese people deny something or state that something is incorrect or a lie. As the sentence is now, it would be considered very curt and thus sounds like the speaker is calling the other person a liar. Adding a *よ* to the end changes the feeling drastically.

ちが
それは違うよ。 “That is different/false eh?”

This would feel much less harsh or accusatory to a Japanese person and more like the speaker is merely pleading that something is incorrect without asserting blame.

よ can also be combined with *の* to make *のよ*. The *の* retains its accusatory tone but the *よ* changes the sentence from a question back into a statement. For example say an overbearing mom has spent all morning lecturing her child on how he/she must study hard and do well at school. The lecture might end with the following:

わ
Mom: 分かったの。 “Did you understand [and will you comply] !?”

わ
Child: 分かったのよ。 “I’ve got it [so leave me alone already] !!”

 ね

This particle can be used as an exclamation much like the English “Hey!” although in practice ね is softer and more polite than its English counterpart. It is often put at the beginning of the sentence as a way to broach conversation with someone or to change the topic of conversation.

ね、^{いっしょ}一緒に^いコンサートに行こうよ。 “Hey, let’s go to a concert together [sometime].”

ね can also appear at the end of a sentence where it serves to confirm that the listener agrees with the speaker regarding the matter of conversation.

^{ごがく}語学は^{じかん}たくさん時間がかかるね。 “Learning languages takes a lot of time, doesn’t it?”

In this case, the speaker and the listener are probably both learning a foreign language and so both parties understand what the speaker is talking about and the speaker can also reasonably assume that the listener agrees with his/her assertion that learning languages is very time intensive. The ね serves to emphasize that the speaker assumes that both parties agree about this point much like “right?” “eh?” or “doesn’t it?” in English.

よ & ね can be combined and put at the end of a sentence to soften the impact of the sentence but to still confirm that the speaker and listener are in agreement.

^{えいが}この映画はおもしろくないよね。 “This movie isn’t entertaining [sucks] eh?”

The speaker likely assumes that the listener will agree that the movie sucks, but since the statement is a negative critique many Japanese would feel that よ is necessary to soften that aspect of the statement.

 な

This particle is usually used in conjunction with so-called “な descriptors.” These are words that can modify nouns, verbs and even other descriptors. The use of particle な distinguishes this type of descriptor from the other type that you will also learn about in chapter 4. (The descriptor has been underlined to avoid confusion.)

きれいな^{ひと}人 “pretty person/people”

変な^{へん てんき}天気 “strange weather”

な can also appear at the end of a sentence with the same effect as ね to confirm that the parties are in agreement. This particular use of な is very masculine and hence generally not used by women, though some women are starting to use it instead of ね.

^{おそ}けんじくんは遅いな。 “Kenji is [awfully] late, eh?”

な can also be combined with particle か to form かな which goes at the end of the sentence to change the sentence into an indefinite musing instead of a definite statement.

あした てんき
明日は天気がいいかな。 “I wonder if the weather will be good tomorrow...”

かな is inherently masculine (although some younger women use it now) while かしら is the very feminine version.

Location and method

Particle で can be used to describe the location where something happened.

レストランで^た食べる。 “[I] eat at [a/the] restaurant.”

Depending on the choice of verb, particle で can also be used to describe the method or implement used.

ナイフでオレンジを^き切った。 “[I] cut the orange with [a/the] knife.”

でんしゃ ^い
電 車で行った。 “[I] went by train.”

Quotations

This particle と serves many purposes, one being to encapsulate everything that comes before it in the sentence in invisible brackets. This is often used for quotations such as:

ほん ひょうろんか ^い
この本はすばらしいと評論家が言った。 “The critic said “This book is amazing.””

In modern times Japanese people have slowly started adopting the use of punctuation so nowadays the same sentence might look like:

ほん ひょうろんか ^い
「この本はすばらしい」と評論家が言った。 “The critic said “This book is amazing.””

...But| Wait! と is also used in this way to connect to the certain verbs, chiefly 思う (おもう) meaning “to think/feel.”

Listing items

↳ と

と can also be used to connect nouns in a list like the English word “and.”

サッカーとラグビーと水泳すいえいが好きだ。 “[I] like soccer, rugby, and swimming.”

Unlike も, と does not appear after the last noun in the list. と can still be used when only one word in a list is mentioned and the other[s] are assumed.

友達ともだちと図書館としょかんに行く。 “[I] will go to the library with [a] friend[s].”

Understand that 友達と translates into English as “with friend[s]” but the と still means “and.” There is actually a list of two things here. The first item is “friend[s]” and the other is the speaker who is the omitted subject of the sentence and will also go to the library.

と can also be combined with の to form との which simply treats the whole list as one giant noun that has a relationship with whatever noun (or complex noun phrase) follows の.

サッカーとラグビーとの違いちがはいろいろある。
“There are many/various differences between soccer and rugby.”

Soccer	& rugby	difference(s)	many/various	be/have
<u>サッカーとラグビーと</u>		の	違い	は いろいろ ある。
Noun 1		Noun 2		

As an exception to the normal rule, in this case there needs to be a と after the last noun in the list so it can combine with の. This way of combining these two particles can be used even with implied lists:

彼との結婚かれ けっこん かんがは考えられない。 “I can’t [even] think of a marriage with him.”

The implied list is, of course, the speaker and the man mentioned in the sentence, though the speaker (who is also the subject) is omitted. The true sentence looks like this:

I	& him	marriage	can’t [even] think of
<u>(私)と彼と</u>		の結婚	は考えられない。
Noun 1		Noun 2	



This particle appears after nouns to mean “also + noun.”

サッカーも好きだ。
す
 Soccer+も+like+verb (is) = “I *also* like soccer.”

も can often appear among lists of nouns in which case it must appear after each noun.

サッカーもラグビーも好きだ。
 Soccer+も+rugby+も+like+verb (is) = “I like soccer and/also rugby.”

...But| Wait! When particle も is used other particles like を or が are omitted because もを and もが are difficult to pronounce when speaking quickly.



と can also be combined with か to form とか which also works much like “and” although it carries the extra nuance of there being other related items in the list that are not mentioned and like も, it must follow every noun in the list including the last.

ジャズとかブルースとかすが好きだ。 “[I] like jazz, blues *and other genres*.”

The speaker is really stating that there is a longer list of types of music that he/she likes but is merely giving some examples. Generally the omitted things in the list are related to the stated things as if the speaker were to like jazz, blues and funk. That is not to say that the omitted things *have* to be related. The speaker might like jazz, blues and death metal although most Japanese people would assume that there is a relation.

...But| Wait! とか can also be used as a sort of conjugation by tacking it onto other words to change their meaning, but this will be covered in next textbook in this series.

と can *also* be used like the verb conjugations えば and たら to create an if/when else statement but this will be discussed in the grammar section of chapter 13.



This particle functions much like とか to link nouns in a list and also carries the same nuance that there are other things in the list not mentioned. The only difference is that や does not follow the last noun in the list.

ジャズやブルースすが好きだ。 “[I] like jazz, blues *and other genres*.”