

Mini Column

Today's Japan ～ Cell Phones and Smart Phones ～

The global diffusion rate of cell phones is expected to surpass 70% this year, according to a certain survey, and already, cell phones with simple mail and camera functions are being used throughout the world.

In Japan, more than 90% of the people have a cell phone. These phones allow users to insert pictures and decorative characters in their mail messages or take high-quality photos and videos. Some models even feature TV viewing and music playback functions or electronic payment functions that can be used simply by holding the phone over a scanner. It seems, however, that such diverse high-function cell phones are popular only in Japan.

As there is little demand for such functions in other countries, it is difficult for Japanese and foreign cell phone makers to advance into the cell phone market in countries other than their own, and the Japanese market is therefore considered a “Galapagos” in the sense that it has progressed along its own path of evolution.

Nevertheless, last year the Japanese market has seen a surge in demand for “smart phones,” which have also become popular overseas. As a device that incorporates the functions of both a cell phone and personal computer, it will be interesting to observe the further evolution of smart phones in Japan.

Communicating Feelings in Japanese ～ Japanese Words Beginning with the Prefix *Go* or *O* ～

Speakers sometimes attach “beautifying” prefixes *go* and *o* to some words to give a more polite impression to the listener.

Some examples of words beginning with the prefix *go* include *goryokou* (*go* + travel), *gorippa* (*go* + commendable), and *gonesshin* (*go* + enthusiastic). Some examples for the prefix *o* include *omise* (*o* + store), *onamae* (*o* + name), and *otegami* (*o* + letter). In principle, *go* is attached to *onyomi* words, or words that are pronounced as sounds resembling their original Chinese pronunciation, and *o* is attached to *kunyomi* words, or words that are read in the Japanese way.

However, there are also some words that can take both prefixes, such as *gohenji/ohenji* (*go/o* + reply) and *gobyoki/obyoki* (*go/o* + illness), and some words that take neither.

Furthermore, while some prefix usages conform to proper grammar, some are only used colloquially, and there are also many exceptional usages that make using these prefixes highly complicated.

In addition to being complicated, the usage of prefixes *go* and *o* requires tact. Speakers need to determine whether or not they should “beautify” their words with a prefix according to the rank and status of the listener, as well as to the time and occasion at which the conversation is taking place. Any misuse of the prefix could end up spoiling a congenial relationship or friendly atmosphere that is built on politeness. This is one of the most difficult challenges of the Japanese language.

ミニ情報

日本のいま ～ 携帯電話とスマートフォン ～

ある調査によると、今年、世界の携帯電話普及率は70%を超えるそうので、簡単なメールやカメラ機能が付いた携帯電話は、今や世界中で使われています。

日本においては既に90%超の人が携帯電話を使用しています。メールにイラストや飾り文字が入れられたり、高画質写真や動画が撮れたり、はたまたテレビ視聴や音楽再生機能、読取り機能にかざして使う電子マネー決済機能等々、様々な高機能が付いた携帯電話が普及しているのは、日本だけだそうです。

海外ではこのようなニーズが少ないため、日本と海外の携帯電話メーカーは互いの国の市場に参入しにくく、日本市場は「独自の進化を遂げた島」という意味で「ガラパゴス」と喩えられたりします。

そんな日本市場で昨年から人気上昇中なのが、海外では普及している「スマートフォン」です。携帯電話とパソコンが一体化した機器ですが、日本では今後、どんな進化を遂げることになるのでしょうか？

心を伝える日本語 ～ 接頭語「ご」「お」の日本語 ～

話し手が聞き手に上品な印象を与えるために、接頭語の「ご」や「お」をつけて美化語として使うことがあります。

「ご」の例として、ご旅行、ご立派、ご熱心等があります。「お」の例として、お店、お名前、お手紙等があります。原則として、単語が音読みのものに「ご」を、単語が訓読みのものに「お」をつけます。

ところが、ご返事・お返事、ご病気・お病気のように、「ご」と「お」の両方がつく語もあつたり、「ご」も「お」もつかない語もあります。

語法にかなっているもの、ただ慣用としか言えないもの、また例外まであり、とても複雑です。

それに、実際に使うときには、聞き手の身分や立場、時や場合などによっても、「ご」や「お」をつけて美化語として使った方がよいかどうか、微妙な使い分けが必要になります。間違つて使ってしまうと、上品な印象がもたらす気持ちいい関係や和やかなその場の雰囲気、台無しになってしまいます。日本語の難しいところです。