

Mini Column

Today's Japan ～ Cherry Blossom Front ～

With the coming of March, we begin to hear the term *sakura zensen* frequently in weather forecasts. The *sakura zensen*, or the cherry blossom front, is forecast and charted on a map with lines, as it progresses through the Japanese archipelago, from south to north, mainly from the end of March to May. The Japanese people check the weather forecast daily and track the progress of the cherry blossom front in eager anticipation of holding a *hanami*, or a cherry blossom viewing party, under cherry trees in full bloom.

Previously, cherry blossom forecasts were officially issued by the Japan Meteorological Agency, but since last year, they have begun to be announced by private weather services only. These private companies engage in intense competition with each other to improve the accuracy of their forecasts and pinpoint the exact date of blossoming. In addition to the conventional method based on calculation of various data, they also resort to various new methods to predict blossoming dates. For example, some companies base a large part of their predictions on photographs of cherry blossom buds they receive from ordinary people throughout Japan. With so many people in Japan closely watching for the blossoms, even a slight discrepancy among the companies is enough to cause a certain degree of confusion. Without doubt, predicting when the cherry blossom season will occur is a major concern strictly unique to Japan.

Please look forward to reading about many other interesting details about weather in Japan through the four seasons in a new section on "Japanese Weather," which will begin in next month's issue of *Technical Intern Trainees' Mate*.

Communicating Feelings in Japanese ～ Japanese Words that Communicate Understanding ～

We imagine that you face many hardships as technical intern trainees learning technical skills while living in a society foreign to you. Perhaps the greatest difficulty for most of you is understanding Japanese. It is certainly no easy task to overcome the language barrier.

In the course of learning skills and work procedures or when receiving guidance on daily living matters, your technical intern training coordinator or lifestyle advisor will ask whether or not you understand what they tell you. If there is anything you do not understand, it is important that you clearly state, "*Wakarimasen*. (I do not understand)," or ask "*Nan desuka?* (What do you mean?)" or "*Mou ichido itte kudasai*. (Could you repeat that?)"

If you reply "yes," the speaker will naturally take your response to mean that you have understood everything that has been said, even if you do not understand something. This misunderstanding will only produce a larger problem or cause stress.

Be sure to articulate your understanding in everything you do. There is no need to feel embarrassed. In Japan, there is the saying, "To ask is a moment's shame; not to ask is a lifetime of shame." Even among Japanese people, constant efforts are made to achieve mutual understanding, as it is an extremely important foundation of communication.

ミニ情報

日本のいま ～ 桜前線 ～

3月になると天気予報の中で「桜前線」という言葉をよく聞くようになります。桜前線とはサクラの開花予想日を地図上に示した線で、主に3月下旬から5月にかけて日本を北上します。満開のサクラの下での宴「花見」が大好きな日本人は、天気予報で近づいてくる桜前線を確認し心躍らせます。

以前は気象庁が発表する開花予想を桜前線と呼んでいましたが、昨年2010年からは民間の気象情報会社だけが予想を発表するようになりました。民間の会社は他社より予想の精度を上げ開花日を的中させようと、例えば日本各地の一般人々からつばみの状態のサクラの写真を送ってもらうなど、従来の算出方法だけではない新たな方法で開花日を予想しています。最近では各社で予想日にズレが起き混乱することもあります。サクラがいつ咲くかにこれほど熱心なのは日本ならではでしょう。

さて来月号から始まる「日本の気象」コーナーでは、四季折々の日本の気象に関する言葉を紹介しますので、お楽しみに。

心を伝える日本語

～ 意志を伝える日本語 ～

皆さんは日本に来て技術を学ぶと同時に、異文化社会の中で生活をしているわけですが、大変なご苦労があると思います。一番の苦労は言葉の問題ではないでしょうか。言葉の壁を乗り越えるのは並大抵のものではありません。

技術・作業手順などを学ぶ時や生活指導を受ける時などに、技能実習指導員・生活指導員から、「わかりましたか?」と聞かれた時、分からなければ「わかりません」「何ですか?」「もう一度言ってください」と、はっきり言うことが大切です。

分かっているのに「はい」と答えると、相手は理解したものと受け取ってしまい、誤解が大きな問題やストレスを引き起こします。

全てのことに於いて、自分の意志をはっきり伝えるようにしてください。決して恥ずかしいことではありません。日本には、『聞くは一時(いつとき)の恥、聞かぬは末代(まつだい)の恥』という諺もあります。意志の疎通は日本人同士でも大事なことで、意思疎通を図る為に、お互い努力しています。