

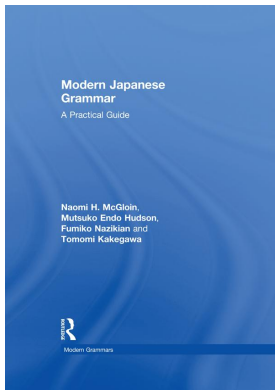
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## **Modern Japanese Grammar A Practical Guide**

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### **Adjectives**

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# 13

## Adjectives

Japanese adjectives are divided into two groups according to their conjugation pattern: **i**-adjectives and **na**-adjectives.

### 13.1 *i*-adjectives

All *i*-adjectives end with the vowel **i** in their dictionary form, as in **oishii** ‘tasty,’ **samui** ‘cold,’ and **takai** ‘high, expensive.’ Unlike English adjectives, which require a copula verb ‘to be’ to function as a predicate, *i*-adjectives can be the predicate of a sentence on their own. They have their own conjugation pattern.

#### 13.1.1 The conjugation pattern

*I*-adjectives are conjugated (change form) by adding different suffixes to the stem. The stem of an *i*-adjective is the dictionary form (i.e. plain nonpast affirmative form) minus **-i**. Below, hyphens are provided between the stem and suffixes in the conjugation tables only. The adjective **ii** ‘good’ has a different conjugation pattern; see Appendix IV.

Dictionary Form	<b>oishi-i</b>	<b>samu-i</b>	<b>taka-i</b>
Stem	<b>oishi-</b> delicious	<b>samu-</b> cold	<b>taka-</b> high

As explained in 6.2, predicates have plain and polite forms.

#### Plain form conjugation

- Nonpast affirmative form: stem + **i**  
**oishi-i**    **samu-i**
- Nonpast negative form: stem + **ku** + **nai**  
**oishi-ku nai**    **samu-ku nai**
- Past affirmative form: stem + **katta**  
**oishi-katta**    **samu-katta**
- Past negative form: stem + **ku** + **nakatta**  
**oishi-ku nakatta**    **samu-ku nakatta**

#### Polite form conjugation

- Nonpast affirmative form: stem + **i** + politeness marker **desu**  
**oishi-i desu**    **samu-i desu**

- Nonpast negative form:
  - (a) Stem + **ku** + **nai** + politeness marker **desu**  
oishi-ku nai desu      samu-ku nai desu
  - (b) Stem + **ku** + **arimasen**  
oishi-ku arimasen      samu-ku arimasen
- Past affirmative form: stem + **katta** + politeness marker **desu**  
oishi-katta desu      samu-katta desu
- Past negative form: stem + **ku nakatta desu** + politeness marker **desu**
  - (a) Stem + **ku** + **nakatta** + politeness marker **desu**  
oishi-ku nakatta desu      samu-ku nakatta desu
  - (b) Stem + **ku** + **arimasen** + **deshita**  
oishi-ku arimasendeshita      samu-ku arimasendeshita

▶ See 15.1 for negative forms.

**Desu** used in the *i*-adjective conjugation in the polite form is not a copula. **Desu** here merely marks politeness. Unlike nouns and *na*-adjectives, *i*-adjectives can be predicates by themselves and they can form a sentence without **desu** in informal style speech and in writing.

外国の車は高い。

**Gaikoku no kuruma wa takai.**

Foreign cars are expensive.

映画は面白かった。

**Eega wa omoshirokatta.**

The movie was interesting.

昨日は寒かったです。

**Kinoo wa samukatta desu.**

Yesterday was cold.

### 13.1.2 The pre-nominal form conjugation of *i*-adjectives

When adjectives modify a noun, they take the ‘pre-nominal’ form. The pre-nominal form of *i*-adjectives is the same as the plain form conjugation shown in 13.1.1.

▶ See 13.4 for example sentences.

## 13.2 *na*-adjectives

*Na*-adjectives are also called ‘adjectival nouns’ or ‘nominal adjectives’ because their pattern of conjugation is the same as that for nouns. For example, to be a predicate of a sentence, *na*-adjectives require the copula, like nouns do. Unlike nouns, however, *na*-adjectives cannot serve as the topic, subject or object of a sentence or be modified by adjectives.

▶ 5.1

### 13.2.1 The conjugation pattern

The stem of a **na**-adjective is the same as its dictionary form. The **na**-adjective conjugation consists of the stem and the copula **da** in its conjugated form.

Stem: **shizuka** ‘quiet’      **kiree** ‘pretty, clean’

#### Plain form conjugation

- Nonpast affirmative form: Stem + **da**  
**shizuka da**      **kiree da**
- Nonpast negative form: Stem + **ja nai**  
**shizuka ja nai**      **kiree ja nai**
- Past affirmative form: Stem + **datta**  
**shizuka datta**      **kiree datta**
- Past negative form: Stem + **ja nakatta**  
**shizuka ja nakatta**      **kiree ja nakatta**

#### Polite form conjugation

- Nonpast affirmative form: Stem + **desu**  
**shizuka desu**      **kiree desu**
- Nonpast negative form: Stem + **ja nai** + Politeness marker **desu**  
**shizuka ja nai desu**      **kiree ja nai desu**
- Past affirmative form: Stem + **deshita**  
**shizuka deshita**      **kiree deshita**
- Past negative form: Stem + **ja-nakatta** + Politeness marker **desu**  
**shizuka ja nakatta desu**      **kiree ja nakatta desu**

▶ See 15.1 for negative forms.

When English adjectives are borrowed into the Japanese lexicon; e.g. **hansamu** ‘handsome,’ **hotto** ‘hot,’ and **taito** ‘tight,’ they are usually conjugated as **na**-adjectives.

### 13.2.2 The pre-nominal form conjugation of *na*-adjectives

When **na**-adjectives modify a noun, they take the pre-nominal form. The pre-nominal form is the same as its plain form, with one exception: the nonpast affirmative form is the stem + **na**, rather than **da**, e.g. **shizuka na heya** ‘quiet room’.

▶ See 13.4 for example sentences.

## 13.3 te-form of adjectives

Dictionary form	<b>samui</b> ‘cold’	<b>ii</b> ‘good’
i-adjective stem + <b>kute</b>	<b>shizuka</b> ‘quiet’	<b>kiree</b> ‘pretty, clean’
na-adjective stem + <b>de</b>	<b>samukute</b>	<b>yokute</b> (exception)
	<b>shizuka de</b>	<b>kiree de</b>

**Te**-form is used to link an adjective with other predicates, as discussed in 22.1.

## 13.4 Attributive and predicative usage

Adjectives are used at the end of a sentence in predicative use and directly preceding a noun they modify in attributive use. To modify nouns, both *i*- and *na*-adjectives appear in their pre-nominal form in nonpast, past, affirmative and negative.

### Examples with pre-nominal *i*-adjectives

おもしろい本

**omoshiroi hon**

an interesting book

おもしろくない本

**omoshiroku nai hon**

an uninteresting book

おもしろかった本

**omoshirokatta hon**

a book that was interesting

おもしろくなかった本

**omoshiroku nakatta hon**

a book that was not interesting

### Examples with pre-nominal *na*-adjectives

にぎやかな町

**nigiyaka na machi**

a lively town

にぎやかじゃない町

**nigiyaka ja nai machi**

a town which is not lively

にぎやかだった町

**nigiyaka datta machi**

a town which was lively

にぎやかじゃなかった町

**nigiyaka ja nakatta machi**

a town which was not lively

Most adjectives can appear in both the sentence final position (predicative use) and pre-nominal position (attributive use).

この鞆は小さい。

**Kono kaban wa chiisai.**

This bag is small.

小さい鞆

**chiisai kaban**

a small bag

この建物はりっぱだ。

**Kono tatemono wa rippa da.**

This building is impressive.

りっぱな建物

**rippa na tatemono**

an impressive building

There are a few adjectives that cannot modify a noun and can only be used as a predicate; e.g. **ooi** ‘many, much,’ **sukunai** ‘few, little.’

この辺は木が多いです。

**Kono hen wa ki ga ooi desu.**

There are many trees in this area.

都会は緑が少ないです。

**Tokai wa midori ga sukunai desu.**

There is little greenery in urban areas.

None of the forms of **ooi** ‘many, much’ (or **sukunai** ‘few, little’) can be used to modify nouns; e.g. **ooi** (nonpast affirmative), **ooku nakatta** (past negative). As a noun modifier, the form **ooku no** ‘many, much’ is used instead preceding the noun it modifies (e.g. **ki** ‘trees’).

[多くの木] を植えました。

**[Ooku no ki] o uemashita.**

I planted [many trees].

**Ooi** ‘many, much’ and **sukunai** ‘few, little’ may appear directly preceding a noun when they are the predicates of a relative clause. In this case, it is not the adjective by itself, but the whole clause that modifies the noun following it.

### ▶ 7.2.3

[葉が多い] 木を植えた。

**[Ha ga ooi] ki o ueta.**

I planted a tree [that has many leaves].

[喧嘩が少ない] 夫婦は長生きする。

**[Kenka ga sukunai] fuufu wa nagaiki suru.**

Couples [who rarely fight] live long.

## 13.5 Internal state adjectives

Adjectives that express one’s internal state (feelings and sensations) require special attention; e.g. **ureshii** ‘happy, glad,’ **hoshii** ‘want,’ **kanashii** ‘sad,’ **kowai** ‘scared,’ **hazukashii** ‘embarrassed,’ **itai** ‘painful,’ **samui** ‘cold,’ **zannen** ‘regrettable.’ Using these adjectives, one can state one’s own feelings and sensations, but not anyone else’s. One can also use these adjectives to ask about the addressee’s feelings and sensations, but not a third person’s. Hence, **Ureshii** ‘I’m happy’ and **Ureshii?** ‘Are you happy?’ are possible, but not **Anata wa ureshii** ‘You are happy,’ **Hiroshi wa ureshii** ‘Hiroshi is happy,’ or **Hiroshi wa ureshii?** ‘Is Hiroshi happy?’

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新しい車がほしい。

**Atarashii kuruma ga hoshii.**

I want a new car.

新しい車がほしい？

**Atarashii kuruma ga hoshii?**

Do you want a new car?

A third person’s feelings and sensations can be expressed in one of the following ways.

(1) Add to the adjective an evidential word (e.g. **yoo** ‘seem,’ **soo** ‘I heard, someone said’) or a quotation **to itte iru/ita** ‘says/said.’

同僚は新しい車がほしいようだ。

**Dooryoo wa atarashii kuruma ga hoshii yoo da.**

It seems that my colleague wants a new car.

息子はみんなの前でピアノを弾くのは恥ずかしいそうです。

**Musuko wa minna no mae de piano o hiku no wa hazukashii soo desu.**

My son says he's too embarrassed to play the piano for everyone.

(2) Use the verbal suffix **-gatte iru**, which indicates that the person is showing signs that he/she is experiencing a certain feeling or sensation. **-gatte iru** needs to be used with caution, however. It is not well regarded in Japanese culture for an adult to display his/her desires and other feelings. It is best to use it only in reference to children, family members, and close friends. A sentence such as **Shachoo wa koojoo o kengaku nasari-tagatte imasu**, 'The company president wants to visit the factory,' even with the honorific expression **nasaru** 'to do (honorific),' sounds rude.

弟は新しい車をほしがっている。

**Ootoo wa atarashii kuruma o hoshi-gatte iru.**

My younger brother wants a new car.

(Lit. He is showing signs that he wants a new car.)

► See 28 for an explanation of different evidential markers.

A third person's internal state is expressed without either of the above devices when it is stated in a subordinate clause (that is, not in the main clause) or in a story.

友達の中川さんはドイツに留学したいので、今ドイツ語学校に通っています。

**Tomodachi no Nakagawa-san wa Doitsu ni ryuugaku shitai node, ima Doitsugo gakkoo ni kayotte imasu.**

My friend Mr/Ms Nakagawa wants to study abroad in Germany, so he/she is attending a German language school now.

子供はこわいくせに、ジェットコースターが大好きなんです。

**Kodomo wa kowai kuse ni, jetto koosutaa ga daisuki na n desu.**

Even though he is scared, my child loves roller coasters.

男は金がなかった。しかし、新しい車がほしかった。そこで、サラ金から金を借りることにした。

**Otoko wa kane ga nakatta. Shikashi, atarashii kuruma ga hoshikatta. Sokode, sarakin kara kane o kariru koto ni shita.**

The man didn't have money. But he wanted a new car. So he decided to borrow money from a consumer loan company.