

Japanese Culture Now

わかもの
若者ことば

Young People's Language: Mirror of Their World

New words and expressions are constantly coming into fashion and then fading away. Many of these ephemeral words and ways of talking are those of young people. Some are simply plays on words, while others enhance the sense of closeness and belonging within groups. Although there are differences depending on age and locale as to how such neologisms are used, it seems many spread after being used by comedians, musicians, and other popular figures.

Some people frown on these expressions, dismissing them as "improper Japanese." But we do often hear these expressions and they are an intimate part of daily life.

Many of them are used not just by teenagers but by people in their twenties and thirties without a second thought. The Japanese that people use in their daily lives is deeply intertwined with the state of the world and the way people live, and people's awareness of words and language changes all the time. What sorts of attitudes are expressed by the young people's words introduced in this issue?

* The expressions introduced in this article are used in informal situations among close friends, peers, or family. To all those teaching or studying Japanese: please be careful using these expressions, as they may not always be appropriate.

* The rendering in parentheses is the standard expression.

ちょー cho

Example 「これ、ちょーかわいいー。」(「これ、とてもかわいいですね。」)
"This is sooo cute, isn't it!?" ("This is really cute, isn't it!?!")

Originating from the kanji "超" ("ultimate/super"), it means "really," "very," etc.

…的/…的には teki, teki niwa

Example 「わたし的には、オッケーだよ。」
(「わたしにとっては、問題ありません。」)
"It's ok by me." ("It's ok as far as I am concerned.")

Meaning: "As for____," "As concerns____."

…ってゆーか tte yuka

Example 「ってゆーか、今日暑くない?」(「今日、暑いですね。」)
"I mean, isn't it hot today?" ("It's hot today, isn't it?")

Originally, one would use this expression when saying something different from an earlier context, such as "Rather than (A) (previously mentioned), it's really (B)." Here it comes at the beginning of a statement that has no preceding context, and is thus used as a prefatory appendage.

…って感じ tte kanji

Example 「こう毎日暑くちゃ、授業なんて受けてらんないって感じ。」
(「こんなに毎日暑くては、授業を受ける気がしません。」)
"When it's so hot like this every day, it's like: I don't need to go to class!" ("When it's this hot every day, I don't feel like going to class.")

This is an expression conveying the speaker's emotional response about something. Rather than asserting clearly, "this is what I think," it blurs the meaning, as in "this is the sort of feeling it gives me."

まじ maji

Example 「佐藤さん、転校するんだってさ。」
「ウッソー?まじ?」(「うそ?本当ですか。」)
"I heard Sato-san is going to transfer to a different school." "No way! For real?" ("Are you serious?! Seriously?")

The "maji" from "majime" (真面目 "serious") means "truly," "seriously," etc.

…とか toka

Example 「これから、ラーメンとか食べにいこうよ。」
(「これから、ラーメンを食べにいきましょう。」)
"Let's go eat some ramen or something." ("Let's go eat some ramen.")

Toka, like "...など nado" (etcetera), suggests the additional but unspecified. Here, however, toka is being used as a filler word without any particular referent, imparting some ambiguity or flexibility to the comment.

These sorts of expressions are also called "bokashi kotoba" (ぼかしことば, words that render meaning less specific or clearly defined). Their use is interpreted in various ways, such as: "They reflect the mind-set of young people today, who seem to have no clear opinions or convictions and no confidence in themselves," "They blur what young people say in order to protect themselves if they turn out to be wrong and to avoid committing themselves to anything," and "They reflect the temperament of today's youth, who want to preserve some distance between themselves and the people with whom they associate."



* Reference: Gendai yogo no kiso chishiki 2001 nen. Jiyu Kokumin Sha.

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