

# Chapter 10: If Clauses - *Ba*

## 第 10 課 条件節

### Chapter Overview

In this chapter, we will learn:

- ✓ How the Japanese express conditional sentences, or if clauses.
- ✓ How and when to use the various mechanisms for the word “if.”
- ✓ How if clauses relate to verb types.

### 10.1 If

Every language has one or more way to express conditional sentences, or “if” clauses. Some languages will use a form they call “subjunctive” to show that something is contrary to the fact, such as if “If I *were* a monkey...” And yet other languages don’t make such a distinction between the factual and counterfactual if statements. In English, we have a little of both. That is, sometimes we use the plural past tense to show that the statement isn’t or wasn’t true; however, it is not always required as it is in other languages, like Spanish and Portuguese and other Romance languages. Either way, in English we use just one accompanying word: “if.” Japanese operates in a different manner. On the one hand, you can rejoice because there is no special “subjunctive” form in Japanese. However, on the other hand, the Japanese have at least 5 ways to express “if:” *to*, *ba*, *nara*, *tara*, and *tewa*. We have already discussed the construction of conditional with the –te form plus the particle *wa* in Chapter 5. The other four all have in common in that they are embedded sentences with the function to modify the main predicate and express the condition for the main clause. We will look at each of these and learn the differences in form and function between them.

### 10.2 *To*

As we discussed in chapter 5, *to* connects two things together. In this case, *to* is connecting two sentences together by making the first a conditional “if” clause. This is the only way that *to* will ever connect entire sentences together.

*To* if clauses are formed by putting the first clause into the plain form and attaching a *to* at the end. Please note that when you do this, the second clause will become your main sentence and the if clause preceding it with the *to* attached becomes secondary.

*To* is different from other if forms because it is only used when the two sentences are almost automatic and natural sequences. In other words, this seems to be saying that when the first thing occurs, the main sentence automatically occurs without fail.

Additionally, there are two important things to remember about the *to* conditional marker. The first is that the first clause will always be in the plain, **non-past** form. This is because the tense is always determined by the end of the main clause. The second thing is

that since the two sentences are connected naturally and automatically, the second and main clause cannot be volitional or controllable. In other words, you can't finish the sentence with, "I will [verb]," or "Please [verb]." This just isn't possible. The second clause must always be out of your control, like "If I study Japanese any more, **my brain will explode.**"

*To* may also be translated as "when" in some instances. It should make sense if you simply think of it as "under condition 1, condition 2 naturally occurs or will occur."

*sensei ga konai to komaru nee.*

先生が来ないと、困るねえ。

If the teacher doesn't show, we'll sure be in a pickle.

*soto ga samuku naru to ike ga kouru.*

外が寒くなると、池が凍る。

When it gets cold outside, the pond freezes.

*nihongo janai to wakaranai.*

日本語じゃないと分からない。

I don't understand when it's not Japanese.

### 10.3 *Ba*

The *ba* conditional is perhaps the most similar to the English "if." However, there are some differences that we will show you at the end of this section. To form a *ba* if clause, just follow the patterns listed below:

Consonant verbs:	<i>e</i> -form + <i>ba</i> .
Vowel verbs:	stem + <i>reba</i>
I-adjectives:	drop the "I" and add <i>kereba</i> .
Na-adjectives and nouns:	use <i>nara</i> or <i>deareba</i> instead of <i>da</i> or <i>dearu</i>
Negative form:	The negative form " <i>nai</i> ," acts as an <i>i</i> -adjective and becomes <i>nakereba</i> .

#### Consonant verbs:

*kaku* 書く → *kakeba* 書けば

*kau* 買う → *kaeba* 買えば

#### Vowel verbs:

*taberu* 食べる → *tabereba* 食べれば

*miru* 見る → *mireba* 見れば

#### I-adjectives:

*kowai* 恐い → *kowakereba* 恐ければ

*atarashii* 新しい → *atarashikereba* 新しいければ

### Na-adjectives and nouns:

*kuruma* 車 → *kuruma nara* 車なら  
*kore* これ → *kore nara* これなら

Just as a helpful piece of information, the two types of verbs are easier than they appear, because all you really have to do is drop the “*u*” at the end (regardless of whether it’s a consonant or vowel verb), and replace it with “*eba*.” This applies to irregular verbs as well: *suru* and *kuru* become *sureba* and *kureba*.

While it is very similar to the English “if,” *ba* also has some functions that “if” does not. There are two functions that we would like to look at. These functions are not as common as the primary function that we’ve already explained, but they are common enough that you should familiarize yourself with them.

The first alternate function is similar to “*X dake denaku...Y mo...*” which means “not only X but Y too.” See the example below.

*Sensei wa piano wo hikeba, baiorin mo hiku.*  
先生はピアノをひけば、バイオリンも弾く。

The teacher plays not only the piano but also the violin.

There was a popular song in Japan many years ago that had the following lyrics. Notice how *ba* is being used to say “not only.”

*arashi mo fukeba, ame mo furu..*  
*onna no michi yo naze kewashi.*  
嵐も吹けば、雨も降る。  
女の道よ、なぜけわし

It’s not just storms blowing, but the rain is falling too.  
Why is the path of women so rough?

The fact that *-ba* form can form this type of sentence indicates that the function of the Japanese conditionals are not just to express counterfactual or supposition, but rather supposition on the part of the speaker and addressee’s thinking. In other words, you think (or suppose) that it storms in the women’s lives? Yes, but it even rains.

The second function about *-ba* form is related to this in that if the suppositional sentence (the clause with *-ba*) contains an action verb, then the main clause cannot have any volition such as command, request or definite expression of volition. Supposing of an action in one’s mind in Japanese triggers some change in condition or situation not controlled by the addressee. For example, suppose in your mind that you went to Japan (*nihon ni ikeba*), then the main clause will explain what happens in the mind of supposition or things which will happen without any control or volition of the speaker or the addressee.

Nihon ni ikeba, nihongo ga hanaseru.  
Nihon ni ikeba, sakura no hana ga miremasu yo.

This does not mean that you cannot have any volitional verbs in the main clause. If you do use the volitional verbs, then the sentence is interpreted as something the speaker will automatically do rather than expressing his or her own volition.

Nihon ni ikeba raamen wo taberu.

Supposing I go to Japan, I am going to eat ramen. (My eating ramen will take place if I were to go to Japan.)

On the other hand, if the conditional is a state, then the speaker's volition can be freely expressed.

Okane ga areba, ryokou shitai.

Samukereba danbou wo tsukete kudasai.

Dekireba hayaku kaeritai.

Look at some more examples to see if we understand this concept.

#### **Example Sentences:**

*Kuruma de ikeba nijuppun gurai desu.*

車で行けば二十分ぐらいです。

It's about twenty minutes if you go by car.

*Sensei ni kikeba sugu wakaru to omoimasu yo.*

先生に聞けば直ぐ分かると思いますよ。

You'll understand right away if you ask the teacher.

*dekireba, zehi yatte kudasai.*

できれば、ぜひやってください。

If you can, by all means do it.

To review, if the first clause is non-stative (i.e. an action verb), then the second clause cannot be a request or a command. A different conditional form (*nara*) which we will learn about later should be used instead. The third example is acceptable because *dekiru* is not an action verb.

Lastly, you will find that *ba* appears in many idiomatic expressions, including *nakereba naranai* (must, have to). Literally, these words mean “if not X, then doesn't become” and means “must” or “have to.” This phrase actually has several forms that have relatively the same meaning:

*nakereba naranai*      なければならぬ

*nakereba ikenai*      なければいけない

<i>nai to naranai</i>	ないとならない
<i>nai to ikenai</i>	ないといけない
<i>naku tewa naranai</i>	なくてはならない
<i>naku tewa ikenai</i>	くてはいけない

Interestingly, if you pay close attention to the middle of the idiomatic phrase, you'll notice that there is an "if" form in each of the possibilities: *ba*, *to*, and *tewa*. This is because they all are implying the same idea of "if not X, then trouble," which is basically saying "we'd better do it."

*nihonjin de nakereba naranai.*  
日本人でなければならぬ。  
You have to be Japanese.

*kirei de nakereba naranai.*  
きれいでなければならぬ。  
It has to be clean.

*omoshiroku nakereba naranai.*  
面白くなければならぬ。  
It has to be interesting.

*Kinou shukudai wo shinakereba naranakatta.*  
昨日宿題をしなければならなかった。  
I had to do homework yesterday.

You may recollect that *tewa* often becomes *cha* in very colloquial speech. Similarly, *kereba* can become *kerya*. *kerya* can then be further simplified to "*kya*." *Naranai* is often omitted in such speech.

*ashita toshokan e ikanakya.*  
明日図書館へ行かなきゃ。  
I gotta go to the library tomorrow.

## 10.4 *Nara(ba)*

*Nara* clauses place an assumption of truth on the first clause that the second clause hinges on. In essence, you are saying "If X (**is true**) as you say or assert, then Y." While "if" is usually the best translation, you will find some more rigid translations such as, "If it is true that X, Y." This assumption or assertion of truth often is in relation to what the speaker has just said (though it does not have to be overtly stated, but can be assumed from the context), and thus this can create a much more personable feel rather than a hypothetical

one. Being that this embedded clause is a conditional on the assertion, the main clause often ends with volitional sentence. What's important is that the speaker is assuming the first clause to be true.

In forming a *nara* clause, simply add *nara* to a plain form verb or adjective. With na-adjectives and nouns, a *da* is not needed.

The Japanese word for “goodbye” actually uses this conditional form. *Sayounara* さようなら (goodbye) can be broken down classically into “*sa+you+nara*” which translates grammatically to “if it is so” or “if you tell me it is so.” As you can see, this carries with it a slight feeling of regret or obligation in the departure.

Another common phrase that uses *nara* is “*sore nara.*” Grammatically speaking, this phrase says “if (it is true that) it is that,” or “assuming the truth of that.” More colloquially, this can be translated as “In that case.”

*kuru nara, isoide ne.*

来るなら、急いでね。

If (it's true) you're going to come, hurry up, ok?

*hanasanai nara, hanasaseyou*

話さないなら、話させよう。

If (you insist that/ it's true that) you're not going to talk, we'll make you talk.

*ashita desu ka. Ashita nara derkiru hazu desu yo.*

明日ですか。明日なら、できるはずですよ。

Tomorrow? If (you say / it's true that) it's tomorrow, then I should be able to.

When the samurai were fighting all over Japan to see if any one will take a control of Japan, there were three famous feudal lords who competed one against another: Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu. Those three heroes in Japan are very well known for their strong characteristics. Oda was famous for his short temper. Hideyoshi was known being extremely skillful at getting people to do what he wanted. Tokugawa was known for being patient. There are three famous *haiku* that depict these characteristics by describing what each man would do if he had a nightingale that refused to sing. Let's see if you can understand the subtle implication of *-nara* in the *haiku*.

Nakanu nara koroshite shimae hototogisu.

Nakanu nara nakasete miseyou hototogisu.

Nakanu nara naku made matou hototogisu.

## 10.5 *Tara*

The word *tara* is formed by adding a *ra* to the past tense of a verb or adjective. Just like the other “if” words in Japanese, *tara* shows a condition that the second clause hinges on. *Tara* differs from the others in that the second clause must always follow the first sequentially. In this way, it is as though *tara* means, “if/when X is *completed*.” Lastly, remember that the tense of the whole sentence is determined by the tense found in the second clause.

*Sensei ga kitara, konban wa to chanto aisatsu shite ne.*

先生が来たら、こんばんはとちゃんと挨拶してね。

If/when our teacher comes be sure to greet him with “good evening.

As you can see from the examples above, just like *to*, *tara* often be translated as either “if” or “when;” while the two seem very different in the minds of English speakers, the two are the same for the Japanese, because *tara* merely shows that when one condition or action is completed then the second is done, regardless of whether it is factual or not. For this reason, *tara* can even be used in the past when we already know the outcome (“if” would sound strange in such instances because we already know). Furthermore, when you use *tara* in the past tense, the main clause must express some sort of surprise and must be out of the speaker’s control. In a way, it’s almost as though after you say the *tara*, you stop and say, “and then guess what happened, Y.”

Connie: *Nihon e ittara, minna nihongo wo hayaku hanasu node bikkuri shita.*

日本へ行ったら、皆日本語を早く話すのでびっくりした。

When I went to Japan, I was surprised at how fast everyone spoke.

Teki: *Mada mada renshuu shinakucha ikenai ne.*

まだまだ練習しなくちゃいけないね。

Looks like you need to do a lot more practicing.

A *tara* clause followed by *ii* is often used to indicate a suggestion, invitation, or encouragement.

*soko ni suwattara ii desu.*

そこに座ったらいいです。

You’d best sit there.

*ohashi wo tsukattara ii desu ka?*

お箸を使ったらいいですか。

Should I use the chopsticks?

Another use of *tara* is to show regret. By adding “*yokatta noni*” after a *tara* clause, the speaker expresses a wish about something that did not happen. *Yokatta* is the past tense of *yoi* 良い (good), so grammatically these sentences are saying “it would have been good if X.” The *noni* is sometimes omitted.

*tanaka san to hanashitara yokatta noni.*

田中さんと話したらよかったのに。

I wished I had / should have talked to Mr. Tanaka.

Lastly, when the stative predicate is made into the past conditional (-*tara*), such as *iru* portion of the *te-iru* form is put into the *tara* form (→ *te itara*), the nature of the regret almost always becomes counterfactual, meaning that the speaker did not in fact do the action in the verb. The counterfactual is made very clear in the main clause which usually end with the past tense plus the sentence-final particles of conjectures (*deshou/darou*) or *noni* (even though.) This illustrated well in the following example:

Connie: *Kinou benkyou shite itara, shiken ni ochinakatta deshou..*

昨日勉強していたら、試験に落ちなかったでしょう。

If I had studied yesterday, I (probably) wouldn't have failed the test.

Teki: *Deeto nanka shinakattara yokatta noni.*

デートしなかったらよかったのに。

You shouldn't have gone on a date / it would have been good had you not...