

■ Use and Non-Use of *Ni* of Time

Some of the nouns expressing time sound awkward if they are accompanied by *ni*, as in *kyō* {*/*ni*/∅} *Tarō to atta* ‘I saw Taro today.’ Others sound awkward without *ni*, as in *Ichigatsu tsuitachi* {*ni*/*∅} *hatsumōde o okonatta* ‘conducted the first visit to the shrine on January 1st.’

Time expression nouns not occurring with *ni* have the time of speech as the reference point, and the expressed time is relative to the time of speech. Examples: *kyō*, *ashita*, *asatte*, *kinō*, *ototoi*, *konshū*, *raishū*, *senshū*, *kongetsu*, *raigetsu*, *sengetsu*, *kotoshi*, *rainen*, *kyonen*, *ima*, *mukashi*. Nouns of time where the expressed time is absolute basically accompany *ni*, regardless of the time of speech. Examples: *ichigatsu*, *tsuitachi*, *Iji 10pun*, *2000nen*, *21 seiki*, *Edo jidai*. One sees that in newspapers *ni* is not used in certain expressions, as in *Shushō wa tsuitachi*, *kishakaiken o okonatta* ‘The prime minister held a press conference on the first of the month,’ but this is a convention specific to written style. In speech the norm is to use *ni*.

In some instances it is appropriate either to use or not to use *ni*, as in *Jiken no mikkago* {*ni*/∅} *hannin ga tsukamatta* ‘Three days after the incident, the culprit was caught’; *kodomo no koro* {*ni*/∅} *yoku kawa de asonda* ‘I used to play in the river often when I was a child.’ “(The time of) the incident” and “(the time when I was) a child” are absolute time, but the event or action that occurs relative to such absolute time may or may not have to accompany *ni*. Seasons (*haru*, *natsu*, *aki*, *fuyu*), days of the week (*nichiyōbi*, *kayōbi*, etc.), times in the course of the day (AM, PM, morning, noon, evening, late evening, night) are presumed within a certain year, certain week, or certain day, and thus, *ni* does not have to accompany them.

When the time of reference is not explicit in the sentence, not using a particle sounds a bit unnatural, as in *Fuyu* {*ni*/∅} *ōyuki ga futta* ‘There was a big snowfall in winter’; *Nichiyōbi* {*ni*/∅} *kyōkai e itta* ‘I went to church on Sunday’; or *Ban* {*ni*/*∅} *karee o tabeta* ‘I ate curry in the evening’. By inserting a noun that expresses relative time, the non-use of the particle becomes more appropriate, as in *Kyonen no fuyu* {*ni*/∅} *ōyuki ga futta* ‘There was a big snow fall in winter last year’; *Senshū no nichiyōbi* {*ni*/∅} *kyōkai e itta* ‘I went to church on Sunday last week’; and *Kinō no ban* {*ni*/□} *karee o tabeta* ‘I ate curry last evening’.

→名詞 Noun (2-B), 無助詞、格助詞の省略 Non-Use of Particles, Ellipsis of Case Particles (2-I)

● References

Noda, Hisashi (1991) *Hajimete no hito no nihongo bunpō* (Japanese Grammar for Novices). Kurosio Publishers.

Masuoka, Takashi & Takubo Yukinori (1987) ‘Kakujoshi’ (Case Particles) in *Nihongo bunpō serufu mastaa shiriizu 3* (Japanese Grammar Self Master Series #3). Kurosio Publishers.

(Hidaka Mizuho)