

## ■ Forms Used in Potential Sentences

A potential sentence describes whether it is possible to realize an action when the agent willfully tries to perform it. In the current standard Japanese, complementary distribution can be mapped according to the conjugation types of verbs as follows.

(1) Five-Rows Verbs: Potential Verbs (e.g., *yomeru*)

(2) One-Row Verbs & *Ka* Column Irregular Verbs: 未然形 Imperfective Form + Auxiliary Verb *-rareru* (e.g., *mirareru*)

(3) *Sa* Column Irregular Verbs: Suppletive Form: *dekiru* (e.g., *benkyō dekiru*)

Please note that the distribution includes the following exceptions.

(2)' With One-Row Verbs and *Ka* Column Irregular Verbs, the form similar to Potential Verb such as *mireru* is widely used. This form is often referred to as *ra-nuki* 'missing *ra*' since it may be produced by deleting *ra* from the standard Japanese form *mirareru*.

(3)' With *Sa* Column Irregular Verbs, *dekiru* may not be used to replace *suru* and *zuru* in such verbs as *aisuru* 'love', *kanzuru* 'feel/sense' and *omonzuru* 'think highly of' (e.g., *\*aidekiru*, *\*kandekiru*). Conversely, some potential expressions that use *dekiru* do not have the corresponding *Sa* Column Irregular Verb expressions (e.g., *eigo ga dekiru* 'is good at English' vs. *\*eigo o suru* 'do English').

The phrase *koto ga dekiru* 'is capable of doing ~' may be used with all types of verbs as in *kaku* 'write' / *miru* 'see' / (*kenkyū*) *suru* 'do (research)'.

Other expressions of potentiality include *-uru* and *-eru*, although expressions of probability such as *okoriuru* 'is likely to happen' are more common. Forms expressing ease or difficulty, such as *yasui* 'easy to', *nikui* 'difficult to', *gatai* 'difficult to', and also *kaneru* 'unable to,' carry a meaning that is close to potentiality. *Kaneru* expresses a very similar meaning to that in a potential sentence when it is in the first person affirmative (e.g., *sonna basho ni wa ikikaneru* 'I couldn't go to a place like that'). However, in negative sentences, it is exclusively used in second and third person sentences to express probability and not possibility, as in *aitsura wa sonna tokoro ni mo ikikanenai* 'They probably wouldn't hesitate to go to a place like that.'

In various regional dialects there are a wide variety of potential forms (e.g., *kakuniii* –Tohoku region, *kakikiru* –Kyushu region). Much care should be taken in Japanese language instruction when the class is conducted in these regions.

→可能文の諸特徴 Various Characteristics of Potential Sentences (2-E)

## ● References

Shibuya, Katsumi (1995) 'Kanō dōshi to *suru koto ga dekiru* – kanō dōshi no hyōgen' (Potential Verbs and *suru koto ga dekiru* – Expressions Using Potential Verbs) in Miyajima, Tatsuo & Nitta Yoshio, ed., *Nihongo ruigi hyōgen no bunpō: jō* (Grammar of Japanese Synonymous Expressions I). Kurosio Publishers.

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(Shibuya Katsumi)