

「から」 and 「ので」

It is some while since a teacher of Japanese language made me aware that I was making errors in the use of 'no de' and 'kara'. However, I have to confess that it was not until recently when reviewing some handbooks on grammar that I got down to comparing these two connectives (also called particles in some reference books) and their usage. Both 'no de' and 'kara' can be translated by 'so; since; or because' but there are important differences in usage.

Book 9 in the Practical Japanese Workbooks series explains the difference between 'no de' and 'kara' as follows.

自然の原因関係を表す (ので)	versus	主体的な行為の理由を示す (から)
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I.e. 'no de' is used when objective consequences occur naturally from certain causes. 'Kara' is used to express the consequence of a subjective or personal cause such as a command or demand. 「から」は主張を伴うので強く感じられる。'Kara' sounds strong because of the element of personal judgement, assertiveness or will that goes with it, whereas 'no de' is a softer expression.

E.g. 熱が40度近くあったので学校を休んだ。 上司が嫌いだから会社をやめたい。(will)
円高になったので、海外旅行をする人が増えた。 寒いから、まどをしめてくれ。(command)

'A Dictionary of Basic Japanese' clarifies the difference between the 2 connectives as follows: 'no de' is used when the speaker believes that the information he provides in the 'reason' clause is valid and also evident and acceptable to the hearer. 'Kara' clauses do not involve that assumption and 'kara' as opposed to 'no de' must be used in the following situations:

1. The reason clause expresses the speaker's conjecture about something
E.g. 人がたくさん来るだろうから、食べ物をたくさん買っておいた。
2. The main clause is a command, request, suggestion or invitation.
E.g. この映画はためになるから行きなさい。
3. The reason clause expresses the speaker's volition or personal opinion.
E.g. 田中さんが行くからぼくも行こう。

Finally, in case the above all seems too complicated to think about when trying to construct a sentence in the middle of a conversation, here is a **simple rule of thumb** from 'Understanding Basic Japanese Grammar'
If not used properly, 'kara' often sounds arrogant. It is advisable to limit the use of 'kara' within responses to 'naze' (why) questions.

E.g. A: なぜこの大学を選びましたか。
B: いい先生がいるからです。
A: あなたは?
C: 授業料が安いからです。

In all the other cases, please use 'no de'. Study the following examples.

1. (O) 昨日はいい天気だったので、子供と一緒に公園に行きました。
(X) 昨日はいい天気だったから、子供と一緒に公園に行きました。
2. (O) 暑いので、エアコンをつけました。
(X) 暑いから、エアコンをつけました。

Books referred to:

1. 'Practical Japanese Workbooks 9 - Particles' by Miyoshi Reiko, Yoshigi Tooru and Yonezawa Fumihiko, Senmon Kyooiku Publishing Co., Ltd., 1997
すぐに使える実践日本語シリーズ9 助詞(初・中級) 三吉礼子, 吉木徹, 米澤文彦, 共著 専門教育出版 ¥1,500
This series of books are completely in Japanese but the explanations are clear and simple. All kanji have furigana on them and there are lots of examples plus ones to test oneself on. A highly recommendable series for intermediate plus learners of Japanese.
2. 'A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar' by Makino Seiichi and Tsutsui Michio Japan Times 1989 ¥2,890
(the intermediate volume is also to be recommended.)
3. 'Understanding Basic Japanese Grammar' by Nishiguchi Koichi, Aruku Press 2000
「基礎日本語文法教本」西口光一 アルク ¥1,900