

Answer to Question # 17: Answers 2 & 3 are correct.

Let's start by reviewing the VERBS OF RECEIVING.

もらう (MORAU), meaning “receive,” is used when you or another person receive something from someone who is socially EQUAL OR INFERIOR. For example, 友達に本をもらいました (tomodachi ni hon wo moraimashita) = “I received a book from a friend.” The SOURCE CAN BE MARKED WITH から (KARA) OR with に (NI). Thus 友達から本をもらいました (tomodachi KARA hon wo moraimashita) is ALSO CORRECT.

いただく (ITADAKU), also meaning “receive,” is used when you or another person receive something from someone who is socially SUPERIOR. For example, 先生に本をいただきました (sensei ni hon wo itadakimashita) = “I received a book from the teacher.” Again, the source can be marked with から (kara) or with に (ni). Thus 先生から本をいただきました (sensei KARA hon wo itadakimashita) is ALSO CORRECT.

Note that もらう (morau) and いただく (itadaku) are used when the SPEAKER is the recipient, OR when the speaker is able to adopt the POINT OF VIEW of the RECIPIENT. For this reason, IF THE SPEAKER IS THE GIVER, もらう (morau) and いただく (itadaku) CANNOT BE USED.

For example, you MAY NOT SAY 私に山田さんは本をもらいました (watashi ni Yamada san wa hon wo moraimashita) = “Mr. Yamada received a book from me,” since you are the GIVER in this statement, and you cannot simultaneously adopt the point of view of the RECIPIENT. Instead, you must say something like 私は山田さんに本をあげました (watashi wa Yamada san ni hon wo agemashita) = “I gave the book to Mr. Yamada.”

On the other hand, you MAY SAY 友達に山田さんは本をもらいました (tomodachi ni Yamada san wa hon wo moraimashita) = “Mr. Yamada received a book from my friend,” since you are not involved in the statement and thus are able to adopt Mr. Yamada's point of view as the recipient.

To express the idea of DOING SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE, as we are trying to do in answering this question, もらう (morau) and いただく (itadaku) may be COMBINED with the て (TE) or で (DE) forms of active verbs.

For example, 友達に本を貸してもらいました (tomodachi ni hon wo kashite moraimashita) = “the friend lent me a book and I received it” or “the friend lent a book for me.” Here's another

example: 先生に本を貸していただきました (sensei ni hon wo kashite itadakimashita) = “the teacher lent me a book and I received it” or “the teacher lent a book for me.”

Moving on to the three possible answers to our question, we can see that Answer # 1 is strange, since it uses が (ga) to mark the friend as the subject and therefore adopts the point of view of the friend. Although it’s true that the friend bought the book, the sentence is really about the speaker, as the one who RECEIVED the benefit of the action. The sentence must be expressed from the speaker’s point of view if we are going to use もらう (morau) = “receive.” This means that the SPEAKER must be the subject, or at least the topic, of the sentence. Therefore, ANSWER # 1 IS INCORRECT.

By the same reasoning, ANSWER # 2 IS CORRECT. It uses に (ni) to indicate the source, and it uses もらう (morau) to mean “receive from someone who is equal or inferior.” Answer # 2 is abbreviated, as is usual in Japanese, but clearly it’s written from the point of view of the speaker, who received the benefit of the action.

Finally, ANSWER # 3 IS ALSO CORRECT. It marks the source of the action with から (kara) rather than に (ni), and that is acceptable.

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Question # 17: “He did it for me, part 2”

Just as you did in Question 16, you want to say, “My friend bought a book for me.”

In Question 16, you expressed this idea by using a VERB OF GIVING, くれる (kureru). This time, please try to say this in a different way, using a VERB OF RECEIVING.

Which of the following 3 Japanese sentences is correct?

1. 友達が本を買ってもらいました (tomodachi ga hon wo katte moraimashita).
2. 友達に本を買ってもらいました (tomodachi ni hon wo katte moraimashita).
3. 友達から本を買ってもらいました (tomodachi kara hon wo katte moraimashita).

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After the Answer to Question 17 appeared on Facebook, the following question and answer occurred.

Question:

Ok I have a very important question concerning RECEIVING and GIVING. I choose a simple example to make my problem clear. Let's say it is just between friends (so between ME and a friend). So then I would choose morau and kureru. I just take your previous examples. There were actually 2 ways to say more or less ONE AND THE SAME thing. 友達が本をくれました。 or 友達に本をもらいました。 At the end the result is the same. A friend gave a book to me and I received it. The question is now WHEN TO ACTUALLY USE WHAT? Is it just a matter of how to put emphasizes on things? Or in whose favor the action is taken? Equivalent to that the example with ME and my teacher: 先生が本をくださいました。 or 先生に本をいただきました。 So is it that my teacher is willing to give me the book with his/her own intention? Or do I put emphasize on the fact that I received it from a teacher? I don't quite get it....

Reply:

*I think a lot of people wonder about this. According to what I have read, and this is confirmed by my wife, it doesn't matter whether you use くれる (kureru) = "give" or もらう (morau) = "receive" in the first example. And it doesn't matter whether you use くださる (kudasaru) = "give" or いただく (itadaku) = "receive" in the second example. There doesn't seem to be any difference in nuance or in degree of politeness, so you are free to choose to use EITHER a verb of GIVING or a verb of RECEIVING.*

*Just as you can choose to say either "my friend gave me a book" or "I received a book from my friend" in English, you can make the same choice in Japanese. The subject is "my friend" in the first sentence, and the subject is "I" in the second sentence, but the meaning is the same. In Japanese, of course, the subject is usually implied rather than stated in sentences like the second one.*