



Design : Masako Ban

若干 jakkan

少し sukoshi

I was recently browsing through a job magazine when I came across an ad for an IT firm that used the term "若干名" for the number of people they intended to hire. When I called the company and asked if they were really going to hire 1,000 (千) young (若い) people, the person who answered my phone call laughed and said, "That didn't mean 1,000 young people." Hirayama-san, help me out.

"若干" and "少し" both carry the meaning of "a few/a little." However, the more formal term "若干" implies "not a lot, only a few" and tends to be used more in writing and when formality is called for, such as at the workplace and in meetings and speeches.

When used in conversation, it emphasizes "not a lot, only a few" and the following sentences contain important meanings. In general, "若干" describes a smaller, negligible amount than "少し."

<若干+verb、若干+adj.、若干(の)+noun>

若干の傷跡は残ります。
jakkan no kizuato wa nokorimasu
You'll have a tiny scar.
(→It will be a scar that is hardly noticeable.)

少し傷跡は残ります。
sukoshi kizuato wa nokorimasu
You'll have a small scar.
(→It won't be a big scar, but it will still be noticeable.)

★"少し(sukoshi)" means "a few/a little." It is often used in daily conversation. "ちょっと" is another way of saying "少し," but it is more casual.

e.g.
少し/ちょっといい?
sukoshi/chotto ii
Can you spare a minute?

少し/ちょっとの間
sukoshi/chotto no aida
for a moment

もう少し/もうちょっと
mō sukoshi/mō chotto
a few more/a little more

少し/ちょっと待って下さい。
sukoshi/chotto mattete kudasai
Wait a moment, please.

★usage as an interjection

Instead of meaning "a few/a little," it is used to call someone.

In this case, "ちょっと" cannot be replaced with "若干" or "少し."

ちょっと、山田さん
chotto Yamada-san
Hey, Mr. Yamada!

ちょっと
chotto
Hey!

★ちょっと+ negative meaning

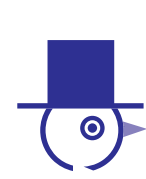
"ちょっと" is used to avoid saying something too direct or hard to say. It cannot be replaced with "若干" or "少し."

ちょっと出来ない
chotto dekinai
I can't really do that.

ちょっと無理
chotto muri
it's kind of difficult.

*This is used to decline a request.

There is similar expression:
ちょっと難しい
chotto muzukashii
it's kind of difficult/hard



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Vol. 99

■■■ Actually it's not just you, there are even some Japanese who misunderstand the expression "若干名," which is pronounced "**jakkanmei**." "若干名募集" means they are recruiting only if they can find suitable candidates. The number of people is not specified, though it won't be many.

Exercise: In the sentences below, replace the word "少し" with words "若干" or "ちょっと," whichever is appropriate.

- 1) 少し 問題があるが目をつぶった。
sukoshi mondai ga aruga me o tsubutta
The problem is a small one, so I'll let it slide.
- 2) 疲れたので少し 休んだ。
tsukareta node sukoshi yasunda
I was tired, so I rested for a little.
(→ Emphasizing the meaning of "a little")
- 3) 少し 待って下さい。
sukoshi matte kudasai
Please wait for a little while.
(→ Emphasizing the meaning of "a little")
- 4) 納期が 少し 遅れるが影響はないです。
nōki ga sukoshi okureruga ēkyo wa nai desu
The delivery date will be a little late, but it won't have an impact.
- 5) 今、少し いいですか？
ima sukoshi ii desu ka
Do you have a little time right now?
(→ Emphasizing the meaning of "a little")
- 6) もう 少し でぶつかるころでした。
mō sukoshi de buttsukaru tokoro deshita
I was about to hit it.
- 7) 双方の考えに 少し 相違が生じたが問題ないです。
sōhō no kangaekata ni sukoshi sōi ga shōjita ga mondai nai desu
Even though we had slightly different ideas, it didn't cause a problem.

Answers:
1) 若干の 2) ちょっと 3) ちょっと 4) 若干 5) ちょっと 6) ちょっと 7) 若干