

Message to New JETS

染 矢 正 一
Masakazu Someya

Abstract

This article is largely based on my speech given to nearly fifty JET teachers in August, 1996. JET stands for The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. The program was first advocated by the Japanese government in 1987 to promote language education in Japan and to increase awareness of internationalization among students and citizens.

The JET program has been successful in the past ten years and the number of the teachers concerned has been on the rise since then.

The intention of my speech was to point out some problems that Japanese learners of English often face and to encourage the foreign language teachers, almost exclusively English teachers, who are teaching Japanese students for the first time.

I touched upon several linguistic, social and cultural aspects.

(1) Japanese English

When Japanese travelers order vanila ice cream as dessert at a restaurant, what they get is a banana. We often hear stories like this.

About a week ago, I heard from a senior citizen that when he went to Canada with a group of Japanese tourists, one of his friends could not make the flight attendant know the word 'coffee' although this friend of his has studied English for a long time.

Words like vanilla and coffee are used in daily life in Japan but they are not pronounced the way native speakers of English do. The way Japanese speakers pronounce 'vanilla' and 'coffee' are バニラ [baniɾa] and コーヒー [kooçii], respectively, based on the Japanese phonological system. Unless we learn how to pronounce English words properly, we will have a hard time in getting across the meaning of even simple words like these.

I think that in many Western schools speaking skills take precedence over grammar.

Two years ago, I had a chance to visit New Zealand for a week or so. I went to a public high school in Christchurch in South Island. At this high school Japanese is a mandatory class for

half a year, and the class I observed was an elective dialogue class for the students who had already taken a half-year Japanese course. It was amazing that the students in this class were able to carry on simple Japanese conversations. When I visited this class, the students freely walked around and changed partners to practice a couple of dialogues. When they had some questions, they asked their teacher in English and the teacher explained to them in English. Other than that, the entire class was conducted in Japanese. Traditionally, in English classes in Japan, a lot of time has been spent on grammar and explaining things in Japanese. What was interesting in observing the Japanese class in New Zealand was that the material they were using was an easy Japanese cartoon. Come to think of it, cartoons are generally conversational and up to date. They can be good teaching material.

As you probably know, entrance exams in Japan are extremely difficult compared with some Western countries. It is often said that in Japan college entrance exams, which are mostly written exams, are very difficult, but once students get accepted, they don't study or they don't have to study very hard to graduate. Their graduation is, so to speak, 'garanteed' and it is sometimes compared to a 'conveyer-belt process'. This is generally true.

English has not been a means of communication in Japanese school education, but it's an important subject, necessary for students to enter schools and obtain higher education. For that reason, teaching speaking skills has been neglected. Japanese students get more and more concerned about making grammatical mistakes as they become older because if they make grammatical mistakes the chances are they will not be able to do a good job in exams. They carry over their fear of making grammatical mistakes when they speak English. This tendency is a big hindrance to practicing English conversation.

On the other hand, It is becoming increasingly important for Japanese people to have a working knowledge of practical English because a growing number of Japanese people are traveling all over the world. Statistically speaking, last year, more than ten percent of the total population of Japan went on trips abroad. Conversely, more and more foreign people are coming to Japan from many parts of the world. To take an example, more than 50 foreign people a day came to Oita city and stayed last year. When people meet each other, they need a common language in which to communicate. English is the best common language since it is spoken in many parts of the world.

What you JET teachers could do first then is encourage students to speak out without worrying about making grammatical mistakes in practicing English. I like English expressions like 'Nobody is perfect', 'Everybody makes mistakes', 'We are in the same boat', 'Take it easy' and so on. These expressions imply that you are on the side of the student.

Sooner or later, you will find Japanese students are very quiet in class and that they rarely raise questions. This is especially true of college students in Japan. Quietness is due to the fact that they are afraid of making mistakes, but there is another culturally based reason for that. I am going to talk about it later. Anyway, some people compare the quietness of the class to 'the deep ocean'. Quietness in a language class is a big problem in teaching English. If you teachers can make students active in class, it will be a great contribution to teaching English in Japan.

Maybe you could create a warm atmosphere talking with your students about your personal experiences, bungles, why you joined this JET program, something about your own country, your impression of Japan, English jokes, about your school system, how to spend a vacation in your country, sports, your hobbies and so on. Anything students might be interested in.

When your class is relaxed, it's as if half the job is done.

(2) *Waseieigo*, English Made in Japan

I briefly mentioned the problems we have in connection with English. I want to discuss them later in more detail from linguistic and cultural points of view. Now, I'd like to talk about *waseieigo*, English made in Japan, because it is one big area that annoys both Japanese learners of English and Native English teachers.

〈Food〉

Can you take a guess what ミックスサンド mix sand is? If you don't understand, let me give you some hints. ミックスサンド mix sand is something edible, and you might bring them to school for your lunch. Did you get it?

If you still have no idea of what ミックスサンド mix sand means, sand is short for 'sandwiches' and mix for 'mixed'. OK, now ミックスサンド mix sand in Japanese means various kinds of sandwiches such as egg sandwiches, ham sandwiches, vegetable sandwiches, pork sandwiches. ミックスサンド mix sand has nothing to do with 'sand'.

When you hear the word カルピス Cal piss, what do you imagine? It may sound nasty, but カルピス Cal piss, has been a very popular beverage among Japanese. It is especially good during a humid summer. カルピス Cal piss is often sold on the market in the form of a concentrate, so it is diluted with water and lumps of ice when we drink it. It is quite different from soft drinks like Coke.

Since I have taken up *waseieigo* that is connected with food or drink so far, let me give you another example of this sort. Like カルピス Cal piss, パインジュース pine juice is among the favorite beverages of Japanese people. During the Pacific war Japan was short of oil for airplanes and had to use pine resin, refining it in place of gasoline. This oil is called ショウコンユ, or pine oil. Even now, if you happen to see a gigantic pine tree in Japan, you may be able to see carved lines on it. Those lines are like the ones on the gum trees to collect resin. Anyway, historically, pine trees in Japan have been used not only for housing materials but for aircraft. Now, back to the topic we were talking about, パインジュース pine juice has little to do with pine trees. 'Pine' in パインジュース pine juice is an abbreviated form of 'pineapple juice'. パインジュース pine juice is, therefore, is a kind of beverage made from 'pineapples'.

What I am getting at is that there are hundreds of words like these in every field which sound like authentic English but in fact are born and raised in Japan. They are, so to speak, 'everyday English words' for Japanese people and they are indispensable to our daily life. These words called *waseieigo*, English words made in Japan, are quite bothersome though, when we

study English. It has also been claimed that they are hard to master for foreign people who have been studying the Japanese language. What you JET teachers could do is correct those *waseieigo* when you catch sight of them. You may be able to find *waseieigo* on many occasions: on a menu at a restaurant, on a sign board, in a magazine, or on a TV program.

(3) English Loanwords

Now, let me turn the focus on to loanwords. As time goes by, more and more new loanwords are introduced in many countries. It is much easier to use established words than to create or coin words. The flow of loan words, however, can sometimes be a menace to a mother tongue. Conservative countries at times try to protect their own language by regulating loan words. In Japan, at the present time, a tremendous amount of English vocabulary has been acquiring citizenship in the Japanese language without being controlled.

It is understandable to rely on loan words when there are not suitable words in the mother tongue to describe a new thing, whether it is tangible or not, but one of the things that often occurs in the Japanese language is that English loanwords replace the Japanese equivalents. Let me show you such an example. 匙 (*saji*) is a Japanese word that means 'spoon'. However, the English word 'spoon' has also been used in Japan. Both 匙 and 'spoon' have been used in our daily life. Some years ago, NHK, the Japanese Broadcasting Company, gave questionnaires to the public to find out if the use of the words has to do with generations. According to the survey, 64 percent of the subjects used 'spoon' and 30 percent preferred to use *saji*.

A similar survey has been conducted on the word 葡萄酒 (*budoshu*), which means 'wine' in English. It has long been used in our daily life, too. In this case, according to the survey, 50 percent of the subject used the word 葡萄酒, and 40 percent of the people preferred to use 'wine'.

One of the findings of these studies is that younger generations tend to use more English loanwords than older generations. I have asked my college students whether they prefer the English loanwords over the corresponding Japanese words. My students almost exclusively prefer to use the English loan words 'spoon' and 'wine' over *saji* and 葡萄酒。My students are really young!

Let me give you another example related to this. There are 58 cities and villages in all in Oita prefecture. Otamura is one of those villages. Otamura, situated in the northern part of Oita prefecture, has a population of about 1,960 and it has been decreasing annually. In other words, it's a depopulated village. Anyway, I had some business to do in this village a few years ago. Around noon, I got hungry and went into an old Japanese restaurant. It was dark inside and, unlike ordinary restaurants in town, there was no artificial food in the glass case nor did there seem to be any sign of the food they would serve. Not knowing what food they could make, I asked the old lady, "May I see the menu?" She said, "What did you say?" I spoke a little louder and said again, "May I see the menu, please?" Then, there was a loud reply, "What on earth are you talking about? Who can understand such a difficult word in the country like this?" But the word menu had been in constant use in cities like Oita. I didn't pretend to be a town-bred high-class lad. Nor did I try to disdain the old country lady. Menu was the only word I could think of when ordering food at a restaurant. I know a few Japanese words such as *kondatehyo* or

shinagaki, which are similar to the English menu in meaning, but they are out of date and are not in my active vocabulary. The word menu has taken firm root in my case.

This incident that happened in a small village in Oita shows an example in which an English word has become indispensable in Japanese daily life.

However, there are some cases where English words are deliberately made and the newborn words complicate the situation. Let me show you an example pointed out by Takao Suzuki in the automobile world. English names are widely used in the car business. For instance, the Toyota company has been producing a series of cars whose names are associated with crown, a head covering for a king or a queen. The top quality of this series is named crown. The sister cars of crown are called, corona, carolla, carina, and so on. A Toyota produced in America is called Tiara, which means the crown for the Pope. Although English has more vocabulary than any other languages in the world, it can not provide Toyota with enough words in the crown series. Toyota had a hard time when they produced a brand new car. So, what they did was change the Japanese word 冠, meaning crown, into the English. They had hesitated to use the Japanese *kanji* because they felt naming their brand new car *kanmuri* is not 'cool', so they coined the new English word 'Camry' after many painstaking efforts.

冠 → かんむり → カンムリ → kanmuri → Camry

The tendency to use English-like words is not restricted to the auto industry. For example, any kind of pamphlet or directions of audio-visual machines include a tremendous number of pseudo-English words.

I have pointed out that Japanese use a lot of *waseieigo*, English made in Japan, English loanwords, and pseudo-English words. But why are they obsessed by the idea of using them? I'd like to give some thought to this point.

(4) Why do Japanese try to use English-like words?

Suzuki claims that there are two main reasons for that. The first reason why English-like words have flooded in is that when the *kanji* restriction campaign took place, the importance of English education was advocated at the same time. As you know, it takes so much time and effort to memorize numerous *kanji*. It may be hard for foreign learners of Japanese to memorize *kanji*, but it is difficult for us Japanese, too. That's why the *kanji* restriction campaign took place under the guidance of the language council.

The second reason why English-like words are preferred to Japanese words in some situations is that thoughts tinged with Western culture, which was sensational in the Meiji Era, are still infiltrating the culture. That is to say, using Japanese is not 'cool', but using English is very 'cool'. That may be the main reason why most T-shirts sold in Japan have English letters on them rather than the Japanese. I hope you'll be able to find a T-shirt with Japanese on it for your souvenir.

I have pointed out that there are many *waseieigo*, English loanwords, and pseudo-English words and touched upon the reasons why Japanese tend to use them. As a Japanese English

teacher, I would like you JET teachers to explain, to your students, nonsensical English-like words when you encounter them. English-like words have flooded everywhere. Words of this sort are a big obstacle in studying English. I don't think that trying to superficially copy Western people or continuing to create English-sounding words will lead us Japanese to broaden our minds or contribute to our understanding people from different cultures.

Now, I want to discuss English problems Japanese students face from a linguistic point of view.

When people tackle a new language, what they should do first is learn the difference in sound systems between their own language and the target language. It is often said that Japanese are not good at speaking English. It is well known that Japanese tourists make groups and that they always act as a group. Most Japanese learn English for several years and yet it is very hard for them to express themselves in English. In the following section, I am going to point out why Japanese are not good speakers of English from a linguistic point of view. You can contribute a great deal if you could bear in mind the following drawbacks and guide us in the right direction.

(5) Japanese Accentuation

Let me give you some English words with a Japanese intonation. マドンナ [madon'na], シアトル [[jatoru], マクドナルド [makudonarudo]. Did you make out what I said? I said 'Madonna', 'Seattle', and 'MacDonald'. One of my acquaintances has been studying English for a long time, and he is running a coffee shop in the center of Oita. One day, a group of Americans came to his shop. Since 'Madonna' was in Japan on a performance tour at that time, he wanted to talk with the Americans about 'Madonna'. He knows English grammar very well, and he can read English without any difficulty. However, no matter how many times he kept saying マドンナ, the American customers kept saying, 'I beg your pardon? 'I'm sorry I don't understand', and so on.

Another friend of mine, when he was on the plane, had a chance to talk with an English speaking person. When he was asked where he was going, he said シアトル, but he could not make himself understood to the person sitting right next to him. He knew how to spell 'Seattle' and he didn't have any trouble in reading ordinary English.

Let me show you another case where a Japanese person could not understand a simple English word. This time, a college student was asked by an American where 'MacDonald's' was in Oita. She was at a total loss when she was spoken to. Because when Japanese say words like 'MacDonald's', we simply say マクドナルド without any accent.

What I am driving at is that the Japanese language does not have any stress accent. Since in English every word has a stress accent, this difference is a great obstacle Japanese learners of English have to get over. The tendency for Japanese not to place any stress accent when speaking English becomes habitualized. Before this basic and crucial linguistic element becomes habitual and fossilized, you JET teachers can direct your students in the right direction. Students often lose confidence in speaking English when they can't make themselves understood owing to their poor accentuation.

(6) Japanese Pronunciation

Let me bring up another problem Japanese students have. I will pronounce a few English words separately in a Japanese way to see if you can understand. コーヒー, ライス, フロア, ストライク. Did you understand me? They are supposed to mean 'coffee', 'rice', 'floor', 'strike', respectively. If you understood me, you are already in the realm of 変な外人, 'a strange foreigner'. In other words, you have been Japanized to a degree.

Anyway, what I want to claim is that there are some sounds which only exist in Japanese and as long as students stick to these sounds, they cannot communicate with native speakers of English. Unless students recognize these sounds typical of the Japanese language and correct them, they will keep using them. The result is they cannot make themselves understood. Let me explain some phonological differences between English and Japanese:

1	！コーヒー	[ko:çi]
2	ライス	[ɾais]
3	フロア	[φroa]
4	ストライク	[sutoɾaiku]

In case 1, [ç], voiceless palatal fricative, is used instead of [f], voiceless labio-dental fricative. Plus, no stress accent is placed.

In 2, the trill consonant [ɾ] is used. In Japanese, there is no [l] or [r] sound. For Japanese ears, the closest counterpart of [r] is [ɾ] and whenever the English [r] sound appears, Japanese replace it by [ɾ], which in return does not appear in English.

In 3, instead of the English [f], the closest Japanese counterpart [φ] is uttered. The voiceless bilabial fricative [φ] is not present in English. And in this case, the English [l] is also converted to the Japanese [ɾ] because there is no consonant similar to the English [l] and for Japanese people the Japanese [ɾ] is aurally the closest consonant to the English [l]. From 2 and 3, it is clear that Japanese replace [r] and [l] by the [ɾ], which may sound a kind of [d] for native speakers of English. In case 4, the extra vowels such as [u], [o] and [a] are inserted between the consonants. This is because in Japanese the basic pattern of a syllable is a combination of a single consonant and a single vowel. That is to say, it can be shown as CV, where C refers to a consonant and V to a vowel. Hence,

JET	→	ゼット	[zetto]
desk	→	デスク	[desuku]
and	→	アンド	[ando]
of	→	オブ	[obu]

Now, let me focus on the English consonants. Consonants such as [f], [v], [θ], [ð], [r], and [l] do not exist in Japanese.

When Japanese students pronounce English words that include these consonants, they almost always replace them by [h], [b], [s], [z], [ɾ] and [ɾ], respectively. If they mispronounce these sounds, they cannot make themselves understood to native speakers of English. It would be very

helpful if you can correct their basic pronunciation mistakes.

(7) Use of Mother Tongue

Let me show you another case where the Japanese have difficulty in speaking English. Since Japanese people talk with a flat intonation or with equal strength, their reading is unnatural and is not comprehensible at times. Typical Japanese reading will be as follows:

Welcome to Oita, Tom.

ウエルカムツー大分、トム

I hope you will have a nice time.

アイホープ、ユウウイルハブアナイスタイム

This is what ordinary Japanese students read. When students are trained just for the sake of passing exams and their pronunciation is not corrected, the result would be like this. A few minutes ago, I pointed out the importance of recognizing the differences between the English consonants and the Japanese ones when studying English. But when teaching a beginner, it is sometimes helpful to teach him by using the sound system of his own language.

A few years ago, an elderly Japanese lady had a chance to visit New York. She had very little experience of English. She had no knowledge of English grammar. Her way of studying English was just like the way small children master their mother tongue. That is, she tried to copy what she heard. In other words, she repeated like a parrot. When she couldn't catch English sounds, she tried to associate them with some Japanese expressions that sounded alike. When she was on the subway in New York, she said to the conductor アゲドーフ [agedo ϕ u] and was able to get off at a station she desired. You know *tofu*, don't you? *Tofu*, is a soybean curd widely eaten these days. And アゲドーフ means fried soybean *tofu*. To this lady, the English sentence 'I will get off.' sounded just like the fried *tofu* アゲドーフ.

Trying to associate words of the target language with your own language is a useful way of studying the language. Let me give you another example, but this time an effective way a native speaker of English studies Japanese.

As you probably know, there are some American professional baseball players playing in Japan. However, almost all of these American baseball players know very little Japanese when they arrive in Japan. Since they live in big cities like Tokyo and Osaka, they first have to learn how to get around town. A well-known translator called Tadahiro Ushigome of the Yokohama Bay Stars has been taking care of American players both in public and private. According to him, he first teaches his friends greetings like *Ohayo*, meaning 'Good Morning', *Sayonara* 'Good-bye' and expressions that show thanks like *arigato* meaning 'thank you.' Since the American players have to use taxis very often, he teaches them expressions necessary to get around town in taxis. Some of those expressions are like *Migi*, meaning 'Right', *Hidari* 'Left', *Massugu* 'Straight'. He also teaches a very convenient expression like *スミマセン* that means 'I am sorry'.

According to Mr. Ushigome, one of the most difficult Japanese expressions American players master is *ドウイタシマシテ*, meaning 'You are welcome.' Phonetically, it's very difficult for

them to say ドウイタシマシテ. So what Mr.Ushigome does is make them say the English sentence 'Don't touch my moustache.' quickly. When they say this sentence fast, the result is a good, understandable Japanese sentence ドウイタシマシテ.

What I am trying to say here is that when teaching a beginner, it is sometimes possible to practice new words with the sounds students are familiar with in their mother tongue.

(8) Function Words and Content Words

I have already mentioned that Japanese does not have a stress accent. It means that all the words are uttered in a monotone. For this reason, when Japanese people read English sentences, they are not good at placing an accent over a word, a group of words, or a sentence. As a result, the way Japanese people read is lacking in rhythm. Let me take up a sentence to show this:

1 Rolling stones gather no moss.

I will keep adding function words such as articles and auxiliary verbs.

2 The rolling stones gather no moss.

3 The rolling stones will gather no moss.

4 The rolling stones will be gathering no moss.

5 The rolling stones have been gathering no moss.

6 The rolling stones will have been gathering no moss.

Sentence 2 is longer than Sentence 1 in length since the definite article 'the' is added to the original sentence. Likewise, Sentence 3 is longer than Sentence 2 because the aux will is added. In a similar fashion, the sentence gets longer and longer. Sentence 6 is almost twice as long as the original 'Rolling stones gather no moss.'

What is interesting is when native speakers of English read these sentences, the reading time is almost the same, regardless of the length of the sentences. On the other hand, when Japanese learners of English read the above sentences, as the sentence becomes longer and longer, their reading time gets longer and longer. Let me demonstrate the way ordinary Japanese students read these sentences.

1 Rolling stones gather no moss.

ローリングストーン、ギャザーノーモス

You JET teachers will soon notice Japanese students tend to drop the s showing the plural. And as I had explained previously, there is no [r], [l] or [ð] sound in Japanese. And of course, there's no accent. So, a typical Japanese reading will be like

ローリングストーン、ギャザーノーモス

Sentence 2 will be like

2 The rolling stones gather no moss.

ザローリングストーン、ギャザーノーモス

entence 3 will be like

3 The rolling stones will gather no moss.

ザローリングストーン、ウイルギャザーノーモス

Sentence 6 will be read like

6 The rolling stones will have been gathering no moss.

ザローリングストーン、ウイルハブビーンギャザリングーノーモス

My reading the sentences may sound very strange or may not be comprehensible for you. However, when Japanese students are not corrected, chances are they will keep reading in this fashion for good. At an early stage, a very basic thing like this should be emphasized. At the college level, it is possible to explain the difference between Japanese and English verbally, but the earlier the better. When students are young, when they are sensitive, you JET teachers could guide them and teach them a better way of learning English. When you find your students reading or speaking without any stress, you could guide them to a more natural way of reading or speaking.

English is a stress language. By stress I don't mean English is a stressful language, but a stress accent language.

Function words such as prepositions, conjunctions, articles, relative pronouns, and pronouns should not be stressed while content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs should be read fully accented.

(9) Cultural Background

A. Japanese Smile

So far, I have mentioned various characteristics of Japanese English and pointed out some drawbacks students are likely to encounter when speaking English. Now, I'd like to touch upon some cultural differences between your country and Japan.

When studying or teaching a language, it is very important to consider the culture behind it.

It is said Japanese smiles are hard for Westerners to understand. When Japanese people make a silly mistake, they sometimes have a sour smile to themselves. This smile is called *nigawarai*, a bitter smile. When someone has a *nigawarai*, he is disgusted with himself, but he pretends to be calm with a smile on his face.

There is another kind of smile Westerners find uncomfortable. Say, you suddenly ripped off your shirt by hitching it in a nail. Or, you dropped a vase by accident and broke it in the middle of your lesson. Under these circumstances, your students may giggle, laugh or burst into laughter. But these kinds of Japanese laughter do not mean they are ridiculing you. They are laughing at instances that are highly unlikely to occur. I doubt that you have this kind of laughter in your country. Some English teachers from English speaking countries are quite annoyed by this laughing habit of Japanese students. Some teachers even get angry and use harsh words to their students. The teachers think they are despised but the Japanese students don't understand

why their teachers are so angry. This is an incongruity between the two cultures. When you teach in Japan, you may encounter these cultural differences.

B. Japanese Silence

English teachers from the Western world are troubled not only with the Japanese smile but with Japanese silence. Earlier today, I mentioned Japanese students tend to hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes. However, there is another cultural reason why Japanese students are likely to be quiet.

I will bring up an example in which an American English teacher did not know how to deal with the situation where his student remained silent (Naotsuka. 1980).

One humid day an American instructor at a college asked one of his female students sitting by the window if he could open it. He thought she would say 'Yes', but she kept silent contrary to his expectations. The instructor did not understand why she remained silent, so he asked one of his colleagues about it. Upon listening to it, his Japanese colleague asked the student why she had behaved that way. "It was OK with me, but I could not say 'Yes' or 'No' because I did not know how other students might feel" was the answer. The instructor thought only her permission was enough to open the window, but on her part she needed the assent of all the class members. She was afraid that her own response might inconvenience the rest of the class. In Japanese, there are many old sayings that admonish talkativeness, too. Let me show you some examples as such:

口は災いの門

The mouth is the gate to trouble.

口と財布は閉めるが得

It is better to keep one's mouth shut just like the mouth of the wallet.

口と褌は堅く閉める

Both the mouth and the loincloth should be tightened.

Historically speaking, there have not been eloquent Japanese heroes who gained much favor from the general public in Japan (Ozaki. 1978). However, in the Western world, many historic heroes have been known as good orators. And this Western tradition is handed down to this day. It is not a surprise that there are mandatory speech classes in Western schools, for example. In Japan, however, very few colleges have speech classes.

This traditional difference in volubility is reflected in art forms, too. Let's take *Noh*, for example. *Noh* is an art form that was developed around the 14th century. It consists of *mai* (舞), *utai* (謡), and *hayashi* (囃子). *Noh*, unlike various Western dramas, is characterized by dancing when the climax comes around: verbal explanation becomes secondary. On the other hand, in a Shakespeare's play, the hero expresses his feelings with eloquent speeches at the climax.

I'm getting into things in the past, but back to the present time, (*Not Back to the Future*.) let me take up a story that illustrates how Japanese keep silent compared with Americans. One of

my acquaintances has been engaged in the flower business in California. He emigrated from Japan to the States a few decades ago. Once in a while, he visits his hometown in Japan with his family in America. He gets on the train in Tokyo and spends nearly ten hours on the train until he reaches his hometown. One of the things that displeases him is that when he sits face to face with strangers in a railway compartment, they are too careful of their speech and he cannot help feeling tense until he reaches his destination. He says very few Japanese break silence themselves unless they are spoken to.

Japanese taciturnity seems to be largely based on Confucianism that emphasizes the idea that 'the younger should give precedence over the elder'. In Japanese society, this human relationship determines the use of honorific language, the order of speakers, the length of speech, the speaker's attitude, etc. For example, when a person of lower social standing talks to a person of higher social standing, he must choose appropriate honorific expressions. Conversely, when the latter talks to the former he is not obliged to use such specific formulas. Likewise when there are people whose social positions are different from each other, the person who is in the highest social standing usually begins to talk, and the second to the highest, next, and so on.

Japanese may sometimes ask you questions that are rather private from a Western standpoint such as your age and marital status to find out his relative standing with you. This may happen inside or outside school. You may be disturbed by this, I'm afraid. I hope that you will be tolerant of cultural differences of this sort.

(10) Other Peripheral Differences

Finally, let me talk about some peripheral differences between your country and Japan. When you notice such differences while staying in Oita, you could explain them to your students because when they go abroad in the future, your firsthand information will be very helpful.

When eating noodles, you may feel it strange that Japanese make slurping noises. But Japanese think it is best to eat noodles with some slurps. The slurping sound is like a special relish.

When you shake hands with Japanese people, you may not feel their sincerity or enthusiasm through their lukewarm handshakes. This is simply because shaking hands has not been a Japanese custom in the past. Japanese are simply not used to doing it.

While teaching in Oita, you may find some differences in gestures between your compatriots and Japanese. For example, the Japanese gesture, meaning 'Come here' means 'Go away' in English. A new Japanese travel guide in Kyoto was at a total loss when his group of foreigners disappeared with this gesture to summon them.

While staying and teaching in Oita, you may experience many, many things, big and small, but whenever you find something different, strange, or unpleasant, please ask people around you and explain them to your students. Your findings through your own experience is more precious and persuasive than any textbook. Your students will never forget your firsthand information.

To conclude today's small talk, the world is getting smaller and smaller year after year thanks to the development of information and transportation. To get along with people in differ-

Message to New JETS

ent countries, we need to know each other's cultures with a common language, English, as a means of communication. I am sure you JET teachers will be very helpful to young Japanese students in teaching both English and your culture.

I hope you'll enjoy staying and teaching English here in Oita.

References

- Kunihiro, Masao. 1980. *Eigoshiko to Nihonshiko*. Tokyo: Asahi Evening News.
- Naotsuka, Reiko. 1980. *Obeijinga Chinmokusurutoki*. Tokyo: Taishukan.
- Ozaki, Robert S. 1978. *The Japanese*. Tokyo: The Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc.
- Suzuki, Takao. 1975. *Kotoba to Shakai*. Tokyo: Chuokoronsha.
- Ushigome, Tadahiro. 1993. *Samurai Yakyu to Sukettotachi*. Tokyo: Sanseido.