

EPISODE 10 TRANSCRIPT

Hello. I'm Sonia Paul, and welcome to this week's episode of Shizuoka Speaks. We take you through various experiences of language learning and living in Shizuoka City, in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan...looking at what personal views--from both Japanese and non-Japanese people--can reveal about language learning and living in Shizuoka.

Last week, we talked with a few foreign students about their experiences studying Japanese in Shizuoka...how it was for them to balance school with work and making friends. It came out that making friends--especially with Japanese people--was not always a very easy thing to do.

But why? That's the question we'll tackle today. We'll talk more about Japanese attitudes toward foreigners...and how their views about English may influence that perspective.

In another episode, Manasi said something that certainly may be controversial...but let's use it as a jumping off point.

Manasi: I think Japan is still in awe of the whites...

Sonia: So, how do they react to you, as an Indian person? I mean, earlier you mentioned that they seem to still be in awe of the white person?

Manasi: Yeah. But not of the Indians. Not of Asians. One is that they could not place me correctly as Indian, because there are a lot of Bangladeshis, a lot of Nepalis, and a lot of people who look the same? Myanmar is also sometimes. So they couldn't really place me much? Plus, they're not people who come up to you and say, "Hey, where are you from? But they will always keep looking and wondering where you are from. And I get that look a lot, but nobody talks.

But also, in Shizuoka, I think there are so many foreigners now that it's not a big deal? And if you talk in Japanese, they know that you talk in Japanese. It's not like, "Oh my God, you talk in Japanese, it's like, "Oh, you talk in Japanese, yeah, I know."

Manasi: Otherwise, you know...some of them, I feel, are racist. In some way.

Sonia: How so? Can you give an example?

Manasi: I used to work in supermarket, and there's this kid, you know, who's pretty cute, and she used to always come and play around with me. And she used to enter my counter, where I basically swipe the products. So, yeah, she became extremely friendly

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with me, I know she took a liking for me immediately. And whenever she used to come, she used to come to me and say bye to her mom. So it became like that, so. But after some I think she was scolded about it or something, she was told not to go around me AND this Indian friend of mine. Because after it, she was so scared, she would never come around us. Suddenly, you know, there was this huge change. This, you know, and sometimes--I'm not very dark as per skin. But there are a lot of people who ask me, "Are you Indian? And I said, "Yeah." And they said, "But how come? You're not dark." And I felt like saying, "Are you kidding me? How could you say that?" But, they are quite color-conscious, I think...though they're yellow themselves.

From Manasi's view, racism exists on some level. But, is the discrimination of foreigners in Shizuoka obvious?...or at least, something that Japanese people will admit?

Here's what 24 year old Japanese native Kotomi had to say.

Kotomi: Uh...yeah...you know, here in Shizuoka, many foreigners. Shizuoka prefecture, we have number three prefecture which have foreigners in Japan. Because we have Yamaha in Hamamatsu, and many fish companies. So for forty years, or for thirty years, we had, like, foreign workers. But still, I really feel we see the foreigners as different creatures...mm... Of course, Japanese people who have concern about international things, they can just communicate. But I think most of the people in Japan, we really see the Brazilians and Filipinos, "Oh, they are working in the fish companies. Oh, oh." That's it. So, Japanese people, they like staying with Japanese. Of course, that is language problem as well. But, of course, they have different cultures as well. That is kind of discrimination. Me...I don't feel that, because I stayed in the Philippines. But, most of the people, they just look down on the Brazilian and the Filipinos, "Oh they are just working in the fish factories, the car factories, they are just earning money and then they are sending money home to their families in the Brazil, Philippines, or China..."

Sonia: But what about, like, the foreigners who come here as English teachers?

Kotomi: Mm...you know, because we lost World War II, and after that, really rapidly, the culture from the U.S. came to Japan, and English was really...good education....So...I really feel...ALT and white people who are teaching English, maybe, they really feel, like, comfortable?...

ALT stands for Assistant Language Teacher. ALTs assist Japanese teachers of English or lead their own English classes at schools throughout Japan. They are different from other English teachers in Japan in that they speak English as a native language.

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Kotomi: ...Because Japanese people, they really want to speak English properly? With good pronunciation? So, like, ideal...ideal style, and also ideal model...ideal something...that is from white people culture. That is image in Japan.

Of course, not all ALTs and other English speakers are white. Remember, Manasi herself is an English teacher, and she's from India!

But, the key thing to understand here, though, is that the way many Japanese people perceive and treat other foreigners has to do with whether they fit the "ideal style" of a foreigner... And the ideal style is, definitely, that of an English-speaking person...

...or, to put it more bluntly, that of a white person.

And it's not entirely their fault. Remember what Kotomi said in an earlier episode?

Kotomi: ...You know, because if you watch the TV, in the English school, and then who is advertising? That is white people, right?

The media definitely plays a role in perpetuating these stereotypes. And white people--based on their skin, hair, and eye coloring alone--do tend to stand out more than other kinds of foreigners in Japan.

These are explanations, of course, not excuses.

One thing is certain, though: since Japan first started inviting foreign-born English teachers and international students here, the country has improved its relations with foreigners and certain countries. And while immigration is still a sensitive issue, certain immigration laws have made it easier for some foreigners to stay in Japan. That's also helped the country open up to the outside world more.

But it's difficult to assess the general reaction toward foreigners...it's not necessarily negative...but it's not quite positive either.

Sonia: What do you think most Japanese people think of foreigners in Japan?

Kotomi: Foreigners in Japan?

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Sonia: Like, all kinds of foreigners. English teachers, Brazilians...or are there very drastic differences in the way they think about each kind of foreigner?

Kotomi: Mm, of course, it depends on the person, but um Japanese people don't like...*kirai ja nai, kirai ja nai...*

Sonia: Not "don't like."

Kotomi: Yes, not "don't like" not don't like foreigners...*demo...*so da ne...*gaikokujin...*That is so, *hora*, because I am not usual Japanese people.

Sonia: I know, but you must know how you're not usual by the usualness.

Kotomi: But like my sister, she is usual Japanese girl. She cannot speak English. But, when she meet my friend, she is "Mm, mm, mm."

Kotomi is nodding her head right now, her forehead creased a bit.

Kotomi: ...So, they have concern about other countries' people, but it's very few people who can talk English, who can communicate with foreign people. Like, freely, with motivation? So, most Japanese people, they have concern about it, but..they just don't know how they communicate. That is their difficulty.

Sonia: Do you think they have a desire to communicate?

Kotomi: Ah, desire!

Sonia: Because if there was a desire to communicate, wouldn't there be a desire to learn?

Kotomi: Oh yeah yeah yeah, true true, yes! Desire to communicate. Hm, maybe just a concern, interest.

Sonia: So would you say it's the same or different for Shizuoka City especially?

Kotomi: Yeah yeah, of course. Because we have Daidogei Festival,

Daidogei is an annual street-performance festival held in Shizuoka City every fall. People come from all over the world to perform their stunts, acts, and tricks.

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Kotomi: ...And compared with other prefectures, we have many foreigners. Mm. So...if you walk downtown, you can maybe find, one two three four five, yeah, on the street. So maybe Shizuoka people, we have more chances to talk with foreigners...but I'm sure if they have desire or not.

Japanese people may not always have a desire to talk with foreigners. But Ria has a plea.

Ria: ...One thing that I really want to prove here is that...sometimes you're being underestimated here because you don't know the language? And that really...hurts, I think? That's why, I really like, really want to study, like, as hard as I can with the language? So that I can express what I really want to say? So that...I can really make them see other things too, you know?... So that I can really tell many good things about my country, so that they can open their mind too, that there's "Ah, there's another thing!..."

Kotomi has this to add too, for the Japanese listeners.

Kotomi: ...So, as you mentioned, we have much more chances to communicate with foreigners in Shizuoka. But, it's like we are making wall. Most of the people, they just..want..to talk with native speakers? But, like, Kotoba Gakuin. There are MANY Asian people who are working like, restaurant, that's part-time job, and they are studying Japanese. So even Japanese people who cannot talk English, they can communicate with them in Japanese. With Asian people. And actually, the students at the language school. They really want to make friends. Like, Japanese friends. So... let's say that is very...that is like, *mottainai*? So...

Mottainai is a word people use when they talk about not wasting.

Kotomi: Ah yeah, don't waste, yeah... So we shouldn't waste the chance in Shizuoka City. mmm...That is my message, maybe.

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As Kotomi says, don't waste the chance to interact with foreigners in Shizuoka City.

Thank you again to Ria, Manasi, and Kotomi for sharing their views for this episode.

For next week's episode, we'll talk more about how the Japanese perceive foreigners and the outside world....and we'll look more closely at the role that Japanese history and culture plays in shaping these views.

I'm Sonia Paul. This has been the latest episode of Shizuoka Speaks. Thank you for listening.