

EPISODE 13 TRANSCRIPT

*Hello, and welcome to the final episode of Shizuoka Speaks. I'm Sonia Paul, your host for this podcast. Throughout our series, we've been talking with students and teachers about their experiences with language learning and living...all based in Shizuoka City, in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan. We've covered a variety of topics. Life in a Japanese public school. Living in Japan as a foreign student. What it's like to bring in other cultures in a Japanese public school setting. And some of the struggles that Japanese teachers face in their jobs.*

*We've also covered learning methods between the Japanese and English languages, and learning styles between Asian and Western countries.*

*And, of course, throughout all of this, we've discovered a lot about Japan, and how it compares with other countries in Asia on various levels--from culture to relationships to English education. And we've learned about some of the attitudes Japanese people have toward English, toward foreigners, and toward the world outside their country.*

*Today, for our last episode, we hope to bring all these different topics full circle. Knowing what we know now, what does the future hold for the country? And why is it important to pay attention to what foreigners have to say about it?...and what Japanese people who have been abroad have to say?*

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*24 year old Kotomi once described her generation as Japan's "hopeless generation." For most of her life, Japan has been in an economic slump. Its politics have been slow to change. And this has affected the national psyche of the Japanese people.*

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*But that was **her** generation. What about the next generation?*

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*Kotomi: ...Now the gap between rich people and poor people. So rich people are REALLY rich. But poor people are really poor in Japan. And so now, the number of kids in Japan is really decreasing now, so the parents...like, rich parents are spending money to the kids. So, kids can study like, piano or ballet...many things...*

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*Japan's economy has been stagnant for nearly twenty years. And it's affected different segments of the population differently. As Kotomi says, some families are okay financially. Some are even wealthy. And with most families being few in number, the Japanese are investing in their children. They pay for lessons of all kinds, from sports to academics. Juku, or cram school, for example, is common among students. It's basically a second school in which they can study subjects more intensively. Eikaiwas,*

*or English conversations schools, are common as well. They cater to everyone from adults to toddlers. But, not everyone can afford to get ahead with these “extras.”*

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Kotomi: So maybe now, under 18 year generations, they are so big gap between rich and poor, so..of course, it depends on the family, demo...But before, my generation, really was not so different. Like, economy standard. Sou da ne. That is the different now... So maybe rich families' kids, not so hopeless, because the parents can protect them, but the poor...poor families' kids...maybe a little bit hopeless. They tend to live the parents ways. It's very difficult ne.

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*One of the other social concerns for Japan--a social concern that will affect the country economically--is its population size. Japan has an aging population. Even with government initiatives to increase family size, like offering subsidies for families based on the number of children they have, the population has been decreasing.*

*One of the arguments to help Japan with this problem is for the country to open itself up to immigration more. Historically, Japan has had tight immigration regulations. But new governmental initiatives show that the country is beginning to look at this issue in a different light...*

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Kotomi: ...I think Japan is changing. Japanese university, especially private university, they are welcoming the foreigners.

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*What Kotomi is talking about is a recent government initiative called the “Global 30 Project,” an aim to “internationalize” 30 universities in Japan. Among its many pillars include an expansion of courses offered only in English and the recruitment of international students to Japan. Currently, 13 universities are a part of this project; it will eventually expand into 30 universities, as the name indicates.*

*Japanese language institutes like Kokusai Kotoba Gakuin in Shizuoka, then, often act as feeder schools for international students to learn Japanese and enter universities in the country...since most of the students who do attend the institute want to move up in their education.*

*It seems that it would be essential for these students to know Japanese to succeed in higher education. But for some educators like Hakamada Sensei, the actual acquisition of the language is beside the point...*

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Hakamada: ...Well...in Japan, we have fewer students, young people...so Japanese society want many foreign young people to come to Japan to help support Japanese society. So, Japanese people, should, accept the non-native, foreign people to live together even if they cannot understand Japanese completely.

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*Indeed, language study in Japan--for both Japanese and English--means much more than enabling people to speak.*

*For foreign students who are studying Japanese, knowing the language will open up doors for them to get better jobs. But their mere presence in Japan is also a way for the country to open up too...*

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Sonia: What is the most important piece of advice that you would give to these students?

Hakamada: Oh. I would like them to teach the Japanese society to notice what is happening in other places in the world. Japanese people are watching America, European countries...but um...we are not watching the other parts, small parts of the world. We are not interested in advancing places, maybe. So...I want the students to make the Japanese society change, and to watch the other weak and poor places, and take some actions, for the people living in these places.

Sonia: Do you think the Japanese society is changing to think this way more?

Hakamada: Ah...some people around our institute. For instance, they have money, they have time, but they don't have any kids... Such people are interested in making friends with students here, and some of them went to students countries to do some of their own jobs or business. So I would like many Japanese...mm...to notice that they should not be chasing only money, or uh, only comfortable life, but...something more important.

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Sonia: So, do you have any...last words that you would like to say about teaching or different cultures, that we haven't discussed but that you think would be important for others to know?

Hakamada: Okay, uh... We are not supported by the Japanese government at all, so...if the Japanese government help us, we would be able to support the foreign students more...Their lives are very tough, especially financially, so...Japanese government,

Japanese society, welcome these students, and bring up these students in this society. Even if we go back to our own country, we can bound each other?...

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*The point Hakamada Sensei is stressing here, is that even when the foreign students leave Japan, the ties they have made with the country and the Japanese people will still exist.*

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Hakamada: ...This is one thing, but the second one is the Japanese peoples' consciousness. I would like them to notice...Japan is, uh...getting smaller and smaller by the population, and now, I heard that the Japanese young people don't want to go abroad, I don't know why. But look at the...Chinese young students, they are very ambitious, and their energy is very, very strong, and they never give up. They want to go forward and forward. So, the Japanese young people will--we will lose. They will win. And um...if we can accept their power in our society...unless we take their energy into ours, we cannot go forward, we cannot go up, up, upwards...

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*Japan is using its own language to increase ties with other countries. At the same time, the study of English has become a national strategy for Japan to maintain a presence on the global stage. Again, here's Kotomi:*

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Kotomi: And now, you know, Japanese company, some company started to have English class in the company. Because in Japan, our economy is getting low, so our marketing is going to Asian countries. So even the factory workers--they are needed to talk in English or other language.

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*In 2010, two of the biggest companies in Japan, Rakuten and Fast Retailing Company--Fast Retailing Company being the operator of the popular clothing chain UNIQLO--announced that English will be the official in-house language starting in the year 2012. And starting this year, in April of 2011, English education became mandatory for fifth and sixth graders in elementary schools for the very first time. They are taking part in "Gaikoku Katsudo" every week. In English, this translates as "Foreign Language Activities"--in other words, English language activities. While many elementary schools have participated in some kind of English education in the past several years, the content of the education varied greatly from school to school, and teacher to teacher. This is the first time that the government is regulating elementary English education.*

*The decision to have English language activities in Japanese elementary schools has been a huge source of distress for some teachers, who feel they aren't capable of teaching the language---especially because many of them haven't used English since they themselves were in school.*

*But the point of the English language activities in elementary schools is not to teach grammar. It's to open up students to different cultures and introduce the idea of communication in a foreign language in a positive light. The hope is that the Japanese will simply become better at communicating--regardless if it's English, Japanese, or any other language.*

*However, there's another issue. As we know from past episodes, the "ideal model," for communication in English in Japan is from western countries. And while Japan has a system of inviting ALTs, or Assistant Language Teachers, to team-teach with Japanese teachers of English, often, one of the requirements to be an ALT is to be a "native speaker" of English...a requirement that--as more countries speak English as a second language--seems almost contradictory to the point of raising citizens to communicate in a globalized world.*

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Kotomi: Of course, in each country, there is a special accent. Of course, I am speaking maybe Japanese English or Filipino English. Yeah! But you can understand and also, we can talk...

...Now...here, in this world, most of the people...people can speak English, ne! So not only from native, native speakers... We should welcome other cultures. So, since board of education in Japan started to settle English study in Japan. Of course, first of all, we welcomed native from British and U.S. and Canada and Australia as well, demo... So, in my opinion, we should really more open to Asian people, too. To teach English to Japanese people. Especially young people. You know, if young people do not travel, they cannot...touch other cultures. They cannot communicate with other people. That's why, in the elementary and junior high school level, we need to communicate more with other country's people. So ALT, which will be the key point of that to communicate with them. So da yo ne! Mottainai ALT!

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*Again, the word "mottainai" implies "don't waste."*

*Currently, only 1 out of 4 English speakers in the world is a native speaker of the language. 3 out of 4 people speak English as a non-native language. So Japanese people are more likely to speak English with someone who has learned the language as a second or third language--just like they have. That requires a totally different kind of English education.*

*Kotomi experienced this herself when she went to a conference in Germany last August.*

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Kotomi: ...So that time, the participants were from all over the world. Africa, Asia Pacific, America...Europe. So...I changed my English a bit. That is, depends on the person. For example, if I speak with Indonesia or Philippines, I changed a bit, my accent. But, when I talk with Canadian people or American people like you, I changed my accent. So we really...we really need to change. Like, adapt? Their accent or cultures? Like, Indian accent is really, up then down. uh uh uh uh uh. So, sometimes, it's really too...to understand? Demo, the important thing is to communicate with them. Because they are in front of me." And also in the Philippines, I really had to communicate with the people in the village. To maintain the microhydropowerplant project, I need to have environmental education in the school. So, if I continue to speak...native way, I mean, English, they cannot understand well. So that is so sad thing. So I really throw away that way of thinking. "I really have to talk English very properly! Like native speakers." Mm. After that, I really feel good. Yeah! I really felt good.

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*Even though Japan is strategically trying to open up to other countries and encourage its citizens to learn English, Japanese is still a good language to learn for business in other Asian countries...like India, for example. Here's 22 year old Delhi native Manasi with more.*

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Sonia: So you mentioned that there's like a big demand for Japanese language speakers in India?

Manasi: Yes there is.

Sonia: So there's really a lot of Japanese companies?

Manasi: Lots of them.

Sonia: What kind of companies?

Manasi: There--I mean, there's lots of types of companies. There's like...basically the IT industry...that, then there's obviously automobiles, then there are what...telecom companies...there are also advertising companies...medical research companies. There's all sorts of companies.

Sonia: So...do you find it very interesting, or do you even think about it that--if you want to interact with a Japanese company, you must learn Japanese--

Manasi:--Yes

Sonia: --Versus the Japanese must really learn English to interact with everyone else?

Manasi: I think it's pretty cool. Yeah, I mean, if that wasn't there, all my studies would go waste, I would not get paid. So I think yeah, it's pretty cool. But I really--see, they *have* to learn English. Because...if they have to get out of this shell, if they want to go international in a big way, they *have* to learn English. They can't keep using translators in between all the time. I mean, sometimes it's fine, you know, but...I mean, the majority does not know how to speak English. It should be the other way around. But I also think on another level--the fact that they've survived--and become such a like, big nation on the face of earth, and uh...like been using only their language...and have actually made it so basically, people like me *want* to learn Japanese because they've done this..otherwise nobody would have really have wanted to learn Japanese. And it's cool that they're still using their language. They've not changed their script; we all have. So you know, it makes it special. But I think somewhere, it's quite complicated, and it'll be a difficulty, a barrier for them...unless they don't break it, unless they learn English.

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*Manasi has some of her own advice for those who want to learn another language. The first thing is that you have to look beyond the language for what else you'll learn.*

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Manasi: ...I think...if you start learning a language, the *best* is if you can stay in that country? I wouldn't say that for English because in MY country, English is like a second native language. So I don't think you should go to England and learn English, because that doesn't make sense to me. But, I mean, just about language. Language comes with culture. You cannot separate language and culture, is what I feel. Because language is not just plain simple talking. It's a way of *communication*. It's a way of *expression*. So yeah, I think it's a very good idea to go there and get the exposure and come back, wherever it is.

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*Indeed, exposure is key...and whether Japanese people will get that exposure more from within the country or outside the country is hard to say. But it's something that even young people are thinking about...like Jogi, from our first episode.*

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Jyouji: ...If I can speak many languages, I can speak with many people in the foreign countries, and I can make many friends, and I think it's good for me, and...I'm enjoying it.

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*Thank you to Jogi and to all our other guests for their contributions to this series. Natsumi, Kotomi, Susan, Hakamada Sensei, Kobayashi Sensei, Nishigai Sensei, Ria, Phan, and Manasi. For Shizuoka Speaks, I'm Sonia Paul. Thank you for listening.*