

EPISODE 5 TRANSCRIPT

Hello, everyone, I'm Sonia Paul, and welcome to Shizuoka Speaks. Here, we talk with different people in Shizuoka City about their experiences with studying languages--to see what this means for different people, and what that reveals about how the world is changing.

Last week, we talked with 15 year old Natsumi, a half Japanese half Filipino student currently studying in Shizuoka. When she came to Japan at the age of 10, she already knew some English, having started studying it when she was in elementary school in the Philippines.

This brings us to today's topic. We know a little bit about English language education in Japan. But what's it like in other parts of Asia?

To find out, we're going to talk with Ria, Phan, and Manasi again.

Sonia: Is it a requirement to learn English in Vietnam?

Phan started studying English in Vietnam 12 years ago.

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Phan: In Vietnam, there are a lot of companies, uh western. So if we want to have a high salary, we have to learn English.

Phan here points out one of the common reasons anyone picks up a new language--money--in this case, a higher salary.

Ria also had very practical reasons for learning English. Indonesians generally study the language from elementary school through high school. But Ria took an even more advanced English course.

Ria: It's because--I think that English would be very useful someday, that's all. When I go to college, there's a lot of English books I have to read, and information and...and I love the movies and the songs, the English songs, so...

Sonia: What kind of English songs do you like?

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Ria: Oh my god, a lot! Like from indie to rock, like, r&b...everything. I love it. I love songs with great lyrics.

Sonia: So, is English very popular in Indonesia, do many people study it?

Ria: Well, if you just learn from school, I really think that it's really not enough. But, it's your own exploration, it's your own study...that you can really improve your English. I don't really use my English until college, you know, I just learn the theory, you know, and I don't have the chance to talk. Actually, I just--once I work, I really use that because I have to make this report to the bosses that I use the English. They're French, but...I can't speak French and they know English, so...I use it.

Again, just like Phan, Ria's emphasis is on the practicality of English. She needed to use it--a language that is not her native language--to communicate with colleagues who were also speaking it non-natively.

This is not uncommon at all. Today, three out of four people in the world speak English as a non-native language.

Sonia: Do you think there are differences in the languages themselves?

Ria: What do you mean?

S: Like, that make it easier to learn or express yourself in the languages?

Ria: Actually, all the languages that I learn, it started because I have this interest in the movies, or like--I have to get interested first in that language, so I want to learn it. If I don't, I won't. So, the difficulties is like....Indonesia...we really have a totally different grammar to English or Japanese, so...it took an extra energy to study that.

Sonia: What's the grammar like?

Ria: We don't have future tense, past tense, this kind of thing. We don't have that. And I really find that...the vocabulary of Indonesia are not that much. So that...somehow, I could really not express in Indonesia, so I have to do it in English. That's why...I'm interested in learning that language still, so "ah!...when you feel like this, this is the right word." So...that kind of thing.

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Sonia: So, what is your background in English? How long have you studied it?

Manasi: See, in India, you study English since you're born.

Here's Manasi again:

Manasi: Basically, my dad is from the army, so he had a strong background in English, and we would always talk in English, so my parents would speak in English. And then obviously, the play schools, you know, everything, from when you started education, it's all in English. All our books are in English.

Sonia: Really?

Manasi: Yeah, so if you don't know English, you can't just study, so.

Sonia: So even at the elementary school--

Manasi: Even at the elementary school, everything is in English. Except for some schools, which are basically government schools, and..I don't know if there are any left now, but very few schools who don't teach in English. They're all English medium, so.

Sonia: Even the entire country, north and so--

Manasi: Now in the entire country. Actually, in the south, it's much more prevalent than the north.

Sonia: Really. So...your country teaches English in English...

Manasi: In English, yes.

Sonia: ...It teaches Hindi in English?...

Manasi: No. It teaches Hindi in Hindi.

Sonia: Yeah, yeah!

Manasi: But Hindi is up to only a certain level. You have to learn it until the eighth class if I'm not wrong. And then you need to choose between certain languages. In my time, there was only Sanskrit and Hindi. But now, there are like lots of them. So now you can choose between French, Japanese, and German, Spanish and all the works.

Sonia: Wow.

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Manasi: So then Hindi is not as much important then as English, and actually, you would be surprised to know that the official language of India is English.

Sonia: It's Hindi and English.

Manasi: No.

Sonia: It's only English?

Manasi: It's only English. Actually, when the British came, they did this, and it never changed.

Let's clarify some things. First, when Manasi mentions the British, she's talking about India's English heritage. It comes from its history as a former British colony. And English has remained an important language for the country since then. But, technically speaking, it isn't the only official language. There are two: Hindi and English.

Her point about English, though, is that it's the most important language for communication across India's different states. The country is extremely diverse; there are thousands of languages and dialects. So English acts as a sort of non-partisan lingua franca--it doesn't favor any one region in India more than another.

Manasi: So, but everything requires English, so if you're working anywhere, you need to do it in English, so if you don't know it...so it's kind of like normal.

Sonia: Oh wow. So...how would you rate yourself in terms of English ability?

Manasi: I don't think I should say this, I should be humble, probably...

Sonia: No!

Manasi: I don't know, I mean probably a 9 out of 10? Because somehow, it's kind of become like a native language for me? Because everything I think, things in my brain, are in English. With a little bit of Hindi in between (giggling).

Sonia: Do you feel like you can express yourself more comfortably in English versus Hindi?

Manasi: Yeah. In English, better.

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Listening to Manasi, you might think to yourself, "DAMN!" Indians can speak English! Well, this is both true and not true. As Manasi said herself, her dad worked in the army and spoke English at home. This definitely influenced her own ability.

But things vary greatly across India. English may be the favored medium of communication among educated people, but India still houses nearly a third of the world's poor population. So one thing is for sure: not everyone ends up going to school.

But even with all of this, the term "Hinglish" is fairly common in India. It refers to the mixture of Hindi and English as a spoken language.

Even if you don't hear it in daily life, you can hear it in the movies. This combination occurs with other languages, too--for example, Chinglish for Chinese and English, and Spanglish, for Spanish and English.

*In Japan, though, that blend is not quite as common...at least not yet. It's even reflected in the phrasing of the way Japanese people speak English. There is no "Japanglish." But, there is **Japanese** English. It generally refers to Japanese accents on English words and phrases, and English phrases that are really only used in Japan.*

We'll talk more about Japanese English later in our series. For now, let's talk with Kotomi about her experience studying languages.

Kotomi: So when I was in University of Shizuoka, my course was in International Relations, and my second language was Filipino language, Tagalog. And when I was third year university student, I took one year, kind of, excuse, from my university. And I was kind of volunteer in the environmental NGOS in the Philippines, mountain area. And I stayed there around one year to have environmental education workshops and tree planting and microhydropowerplant projects, biogas.

Sonia: What made you decide to learn Tagalog as your foreign language?

Kotomi: Ah, as foreign language. I don't know exactly, but...my entrance exam for the University of Shizuoka, that was short essay. And at that time, Prime Minister Koizumi and Arroyo--

Arroyo being Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo---

Kotomi: ---was minister of the Philippines--and they just decided free trade agreement. And that time, Japan decided to welcome more nurse or caretakers, caregivers, from

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the Philippines. So that time, I was really thinking--even though we have much foreigners here in Shizuoka, and then...we--we can welcome... more foreigners? I think because still, we have many problems with foreigners, like kind of there is some discrimination and there is still...like, we have some discrimination to Indonesians and Brazilians who are working in Shizuoka...So I just wrote about, in my essay...what's going to happen if we welcome more Filipino workers to Shizuoka? I cannot remember well, but something like that. And after that, I could pass the examination, and I could enter the University of Shizuoka. And...then, we have to decide our second language...so, I chose Tagalog!

And also...I was in the track and field club when I was a high school student, and my friend, her mother, that is Filipina...and when I went to their house...yeah, like their hospitality? Hmm. They always welcomed me very well. They are so kind. Hmm. So...maybe, a bit, I faced Filipino cultures that time, when I was in high school? Mmm. Maybe that's why. But I really, really did not think about it deeply or well. Yeah, to chose Tagalog.

Obviously, Kotomi speaks English too! She continued to study it while she was in university...and, when she was in the Philippines.

Kotomi: Actually, in the Philippines, they have seven thousand islands? And, in terms of language, they have 170 to 180 languages. So Tagalog is only one language, which is located around Manila. So, in mountain area, they are speaking Ilocano language, or English. So, I had to communicate with them..Tagalog or sometimes Ilocano, or English. So...yeah, maybe, my English was kind of improved! (giggles)

The Philippines, along with countries like India and Singapore, consistently ranks highest among Asian countries for English proficiency. Japan, on the other hand, consistently ranks lowest. But in those countries, English is an official language. In Japan, the only official language is Japanese.

In 2004 and 2005, data from TOEFL--that's stands for the Test Of English as a Foreign Language--revealed that Japan had the second lowest average score among all Asian countries. The only country it ranked higher than was North Korea...and only by one point.

That's not to say that Japan isn't trying to improve. The 2010 data from TOEFL, for example, show that Japan increased its average paper-based scores, and now ranks higher than several other Asian countries....It's computer-based scores, on the other hand...well, for that, Japan came second to last again.....

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But exams only tell one side of the story. They don't say much about a person's practical ability with a language. And it's common understanding, both in Japan and outside Japan, that Japanese people are poor English speakers.

*The country is also behind other Asian nations--which **don't** have English as an official language--when it comes to implementing stronger curriculum for English. English education has long been required in Japan in junior high and high schools. But it's only this year, from April 2011 onward, that English Activities are required for fifth and sixth grades at elementary schools.*

China made English language education compulsory in elementary schools in 2001. South Korea made the same move in 1997. And Thailand implemented English education in elementary schools in 1996...fifteen years before Japan is starting.

It makes you wonder...what are the attitudes behind Japan's educational language policy...and the attitudes of its citizens when it comes to English? Where do they come from? Continue to tune in during the coming weeks as we try to find the answers to those questions.

Thank you to Phan, Ria, Manasi, and Kotomi. I'm Sonia Paul. This has been the latest episode of Shizuoka Speaks. Thank you for listening.