

EPISODE 6 TRANSCRIPT

*Hello, everyone, I'm Sonia Paul. Welcome to this week's episode of Shizuoka Speaks. We give a behind-the-scenes, personal look at language learning in Japan, all from various perspectives--cultural, educational, linguistic, student, teacher. We're based in Shizuoka City, in Shizuoka prefecture, Japan.*

*Last week, we discussed real stories of English language learning in India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. This week, we continue our discussion of language learning. But, we're basing it in Japan. And instead of talking to students, we're talking with teachers.*

*We'll divide this episode into two parts.*

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Susan: Ahh...of course, I like English and I like to communicate with the people in other countries. It's very...wonderful. Ahh, I can understand what they said. I choose the English, and...when I was a junior high school student, I had many good experiences at school, so I want to become a teacher.

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*That's Susan--she's a junior high school English teacher in Shizuoka City. But we already know from previous discussions that Japanese people are terribly shy. And they don't have as high scores on English proficiency exams as their Asian counterparts. So, what is it like to be a teacher of English for a population that seems destined to struggle with the language? What are the biggest difficulties?*

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Susan: Difficulty! it's my...my speaking English ability! Yeah, I have to improve my English, always--it's very hard. And I...I don't have experience about staying at other countries, so, I don't know about the natives' way, so...I have to learn....

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*Wait, did we just hear that? Let's play it again:*

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Susan: Difficulty! it's my...my speaking English ability!

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*The biggest challenge for Susan, even before she can think of teaching her students, is to maintain her own self-confidence as a language teacher.*

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*And that's not just for Susan. Remember Nishigai Sensei? She teaches Japanese to foreign students. It turns out, teaching Japanese was not her initial plan. And this only came out when she revealed why she became a Japanese teacher. (have last sentence overlap with first sentence of clip)*

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Sonia: Why did you decide to become a Japanese language teacher?

Nishigai: Ahh....because I like languages...Well, I wanted to be an English teacher. But I was always...I felt so...frustrated, because English is not my first language. So sometimes I cannot explain, I cannot answer their questions...that made me so embarrassed. Then, if I teach Japanese, I could be better teacher! Eh, no, I don't think so. But, I like languages.

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*After listening to this, I think many listeners might agree--Japanese teachers really need to gain more confidence. And they know it too. But doubts about their abilities are just one thing teachers must deal with...*

*Here's Susan again:*

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Sonia: ....I think your English is really great, but...what about motivating the students or...keeping them interested in English. Is it very difficult?

Susan: Yeah, very difficult. So, some students said, "I don't go to other countries, so I don't have to study English." When I heard that, I always feel sad! Yeah...

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*Forget the trials associated with teaching any kind of language--tests, pronunciation, verb forms. Students in Japan are having trouble even just seeing the point.*

*They know that English is a worldwide language. Yet, as Susan just mentioned, some are content to stay in Japan...where they believe they'll never have to use English.*

*But Susan knows a handy way of getting someone to start learning. English is a means to travel...but travel is also a means to practice English.*

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Susan: And I...I don't have experience about staying in other countries, so, I don't know about the natives' way...so... have to learn....so, I like traveling other countries.

Sonia: So what countries have you been to?

Susan: Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Sweden, Belgium, Czech Republic, Austria, Italy...Greece!

Sonia: Wow! So, why did you first decide to go to these countries, or did you have different reasons for going to different countries?

Susan: When I was young, it's very cheap to go to Asian countries, so I choose Asian countries. But when I visited Vietnam, I got a lot..much power from the people. Vietnam is not so developed country, right? But people are very active to live. Yeah, it was very...moved...and I wanted to see the world heritages, so I choose Cambodia or Italy.

Sonia: So what do you think of the different kinds of people that you encountered in these countries? Meeting Vietnamese people, you said that you were moved, like Indonesian people, Thai people, Swedish people. What do you think of all these different kinds of people?

Susan: In Europe, the people are very kind to the foreigners. Maybe not many people, but people. Even the foreigners. And very polite. So, in Asian country...they have the strong motivation to, to earn...the money to live ...so their eyes are very....very...strong. They live...very hard. So very cheerful and very active. But in Japan, many people are very busy and tired. Maybe Japanese people are richer than the people in Asian countries. But we don't have the eyes, the power of the eyes, that they do in Asian countries. That is...a kind of shock!

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*Now, for our second act, we'll look at teaching from a different perspective....from someone instructing foreign students.*

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Hakamada: Hello?.. My name is Yasuko Hakamada.---

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*You remember Hakamada Sensei, right? Well, just in case you don't:*

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Hakamada: ---I am principal of Kokusai Kotoba Gakuin Japanese language institute. Our school is situated in Shizuoka City, 7 or 8 minutes on foot from Shizuoka JR station.

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Sonia: What is it like to teach students from so many different countries?

Hakamada: How?

Sonia: How, or...what is your approach to teaching?

Hakamada: I don't think we need a special way to do that. Yes, we teach the Japanese language to foreign students, but the...the most important thing for communication is not the language itself...

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*This takes us back to an earlier episode:*

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Hakamada: The most important thing is to try to understand how students live in their own countries, why they want to come to Japan...how they, and we, can connect each other, understand each other--this is the most important thing.

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*But here's more about **why** she believes this...*

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Hakamada: Of course, we teach them Japanese, but at the same time, we can learn something important, more important from them. And um...through teaching Japanese, we can communicate from our heart to their heart...So, there are many different kinds of methods to teach languages, but um...this is my, um..motto...'Cause if they can, you know, understand how to read Japanese letters, how to make greetings to the Japanese people from each other, they can get the answers from the books or from the Japanese people. But I would like them to open their minds to tell their stories to us....of course, I want them to understand the Japanese language, how the Japanese think and live, but at the same time, I would like to learn how they think and how they live.

Sonia: So what are the kinds of things that you've learned from the students?

Hakamada: Ah...well...to tell the truth...I....I face the...big problems between the rich countries and the poor countries. Why do they have to learn Japanese in order to succeed in their future? They study Japanese because...they want to get money. They want to be rich. They want to be successful. And if they don't have to, I suppose they wouldn't come to Japan...'cause Japanese language is very difficult. And of course

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Japan is a very safe and clean country, beautiful country. But at the same time very, very strict, so for the students from these east southern Asian countries, it's a little bit hard for them to live here. But they do, because...it's just for their success.

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Sonia: So, what made you want to teach foreigners Japanese, or...how did you get involved in this kind of teaching?

Hakamada: Okay..I went to the university to learn English. I stayed uh at this university for four years to learn English, and I wanted to be an English specialist. But, at the same time, I, uh, found out that it's very hard for me to be a native speaker...English speaker...I mean...native--I cannot be an American, I cannot be an...English person, native speaker. It's impossible. ...Yes, I can speak English, a little bit, but I cannot get the feeling, how they feel, the native speakers feel...how they think...So I, maybe, I lost my confidence to go on this study, and um...I don't know when...maybe twenty years ago or so...I happened to...teach Japanese to the...foreign people, friends. And at the time, "Ah, I am a Japanese," so I have my identity as a Japanese. In my body, in my soul, I can feel, Japan...So, from the bottom of my soul, I can teach Japanese to the foreign students, Japanese mentality, but...English is...something foreign to me...mm...that's why, I uh, changed my changed my way to the Japanese teaching.

Sonia: Do you think it is, uh, very different to teach Japanese than to teach English? Even if you were a Japanese person or some other kind of country?

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*You may be wondering what I was trying to get at here. What I was trying to find out from her, was...which has a larger influence in teaching languages? Is it the actual language, in the linguistic sense? Or does it have something more to do with the culture of the teacher?...or the psychology of that person teaching?*

*From Hakamada Sensei's answer, for her, it sounds like the latter.*

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Hakamada: Well...cause...if I uh, read Japanese books, novels, history books, or philosophy books...I can understand, you know, what is written in Japanese. How do I understand these books? Not here...not by my brains, but my mentality, from my soul. That's why I can...I want to explain, how the Japanese people think, how the Japanese books are written. But when I teach English to the Japanese students, uh--for instance... "to swim in this river is very dangerous"...I can explain this sentence, you know, grammatical things in English. But then, I don't know when this sentence is used, what kind of situation--I don't know. This is the difference, big difference for me...'cause I cannot feel any confidence in myself to teach English to the top level. That's why I,

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uh...give up teaching English. Yes, even now I teach English to the foreign students and to the Japanese students, but...to the...middle level...this is my, my problem, maybe.

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*Many people, Japanese and non-Japanese alike, sometimes complain about language teachers. "How are they teaching our children? What are they teaching? Are they even qualified?" And, this is a common saying among some non-Japanese English teachers: "They have terrible English! I can't even understand them."*

*But after listening to the stories of these teachers--and they are only **three** out of vast numbers throughout Japan--knowing that each of them struggles with confidence in English...and listening to them speak about it in English, as some of them CONTINUE to teach English in some aspect.....well, it makes me pause before passing judgement.*

*Thank you to Susan, Nishigai Sensei, and Hakamada Sensei for sharing their stories with us.*

*Next week, we'll continue the topic of Japanese attitudes toward English. Stay tuned.*

*For Shizuoka Speaks, I'm Sonia Paul. Thank you for listening.*