

EPISODE 9 TRANSCRIPT

*Hello, and welcome to this week's episode of Shizuoka Speaks. My name is Sonia Paul, your host for this series. We talk about everything you could possibly imagine related to culture and language learning in Japan...what it's like to study English, what it's like to study Japanese, how people understand various cultures, and much, much more.*

*Last week, we discussed personal opinions of Japanese people and culture. We heard from Kotomi and Susan, who are both Japanese, as well as from students who are studying the Japanese language in Shizuoka: Phan, from Vietnam, Manasi, from India, and Ria, from Indonesia, whom we'll hear from right now.*

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Sonia: so when you came to Shizuoka, was it the first place you went to in Japan?

Ria: Well, I stopped in Nagoya, so I went here alone, and I went to Nagoya, and I got lost for two hours there and then...somehow I finally made it here.

Sonia: And so you said you studied a little bit in Indonesia? Like, the basics.

Ria: The basics, yeah...

Sonia: So, what did you think when you first came here?

Ria: It was like, oh my God, a dream could really do come true, and then, okay, now I have my dream, now what...

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*This week's topic? The "now what?" as Ria said. How is it to be immersed in Japanese life...to study Japanese in Shizuoka?*

*We're going to divide this episode into three parts. The first part: study. The second segment: work. And the third part...well, everything else that comes along with living abroad.*

*Part 1: Study*

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Manasi: The college that I go to, the building was so small..I was like, I came all over to Japan to *this*? I thought it would be like a college, you know. And a college is *big*, man. And it's a lot of students, but...

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*If you haven't listened to this podcast before or can't recognize her voice, that's Manasi, from India. The "college" she is describing is not technically a college--it's the Japanese language institute, Kokusai Kotoba Gakuin.*

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Sonia: So how would you compare studying Japanese in Japan to studying Japanese in India?

Manasi: Oh, there's a vast difference... Studying in Japan, Japanese becomes so natural because here, they don't use English. They don't talk in English. You can't use any other language *but* Japanese, so you're forced to talk.

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*For the school that Manasi, Ria, and Phan all attended, Kokusai Kotoba Gakuin, the teachers really make sure of this. They divide the students into different classes...and because they're all from different countries, Japanese becomes the lingua franca. Here's Ria with more information:*

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Ria: So, in my school, there are all mostly Asians. Some Europeans and Americans, I think, really rare, but mostly Asians. The good thing is that if you don't, you know, play with people from your same country, you don't use your language, right? So, no matter how, you have to use your Japanese... And in my class, it's like, uh...I am the only Indonesian, so I will have to use the Japanese...that's why, I think...I got better...a bit.

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*So, studying abroad...being immersed in the country...that's when language learning--at least, for Japanese--becomes a must rather than simply an academic interest...*

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Manasi: ...And once you start talking, you know, even basic necessities like shopping in a supermarket, you start realizing like, okay, this is what they use? Oh really? Or this is how the nuance is, that's how you pronounce this, and that's what they mean when they say this, you know. But in India, it's very artificial. It's very forced Japanese... So I feel that's a big difference. Because Japanese is so tough that you can't really learn it without actually speaking it every day.

Sonia: So you're interacting with them daily, but in the classroom...are the teaching methods different? Are the styles...

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Manasi: Teaching methods, yes, are extremely different, actually. In India, the classes I went to or heard of, they concentrate mainly on these exams that you have, the JLPT exams?

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*JLPT stands for Japanese Language Proficiency Test.*

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Manasi: ...So basically, people only want to study for that, because that *proves* that you have this level and so you can get a job. So they teach you according to that, and nothing else. So, you're just learning that, you're learning kanjis *for* the test.

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*Wait a minute--doesn't that sound like what Kotomi said about studying English in Japan?*

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Kotomi: So...that is educational problem, I guess. Even we study English in junior high school or high school, we just use for entrance exam to the high school or entrance exam to the university. That's all.

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*But, Kotomi is talking about studying English in Japan. And Manasi is talking about studying Japanese in India. Studying Japanese in Japan--an immersion kind of education--is an entirely different story...*

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Manasi: Here, it's more of a--you're learning Japanese from a grassroots level. And learning everything related to the language. And you know, we have these cultural outings as well, where they take us to these tea ceremonies and they take us to these places and events. You have fun, much more fun here. And plus you're interacting with so many other kinds of people. From other countries. So I think that gives you a lot of other exposure. Plus, you know, even if you make friends with them, you need to talk with them in Japanese and nothing else. So you know, it really helps. And it becomes quite natural for you to talk.

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*Part 2: Work*

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*For a good majority of foreign students who study Japanese in Shizuoka City, they have to take on part-time jobs to support themselves. Ria, for instance, has worked everywhere from a ramen shop to a grocery store to a bakery. And Manasi, remember, took on a job as an English tutor. She works in a restaurant as well...*

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Manasi: ...which is a Bangladeshi restaurant, which is quite weird. Sometimes these Bangladeshi people will come there, and they'll start talking to me in their language, and I'll be like, uh, excuse me. Just because I work here doesn't mean I'm Bangladeshi, you know! So yeah, I really enjoy working there... And if I have a class with a student I do that.

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*Phan took on a few jobs since first coming to Japan as well. The first month he lived in Japan, he worked in a convenience store. But he ended up quitting that job...*

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Phan: The salary was not very good...

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*....His next job?...*

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Phan: ...After that I was an employee in a factory.

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*With Shizuoka home to a number of industries and manufacturing companies in Japan, factory work is not uncommon.*

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Sonia: What did you think of that job?

Phan: Until now, when I remember that job, I feel like hell.

Sonia: You feel like hell?

Phan: Yes. Very, very hard job. When I first came to Japan, I was about 80 kilograms. But at this moment, my weight is about 60 or 65. I lost a lot of weight.

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Sonia: Just working in the factory?

Phan: Yes, and a lot of stress. Because the manager is the old kind of man in Japan. Very, very strict. He is a nice person, but in work, he is very, very strict, and he always scolds us for mistakes. And his wife is most terrible. Her voice is even bigger than the noise from the machine.

Sonia: Really?

Phan: Yes. Whenever he scolds somebody, all of us feel scared. But they were very nice person in and of themselves.

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*Students like Phan, who are in Japan on student visas, have work hours that are limited by law. But with school during the day, they often take night shifts or work odd hours. As a result, many of them have irregular schedules or sleeping patterns.*

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Phan: When I worked in the nut factory, I slept about 4 hours per day. Because I have to learn a lot of Japanese.

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*Phan doesn't work in the nut factory anymore. And that was probably the worst job he ever had.*

*With so many different kinds of jobs in Japan--not to mention different personalities--it's hard to generalize the experiences foreign students have with working in Shizuoka. But one thing is for sure: they definitely work hard.*

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*Part 3 of our episode: everything else.*

*So, what is "everything else?" Well, first off, there's homesickness.*

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Phan: Of course I get homesick, but I cannot say it aloud. Because I am afraid I will collapse after I say that.

Sonia: Collapse?

Phan: Yes, totally exhausted.

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Sonia: Do you keep in touch with your family back home?

Phan: Yes, I always chat with them through Yahoo messenger...and uh...I am proud that I can help my family about financial problems.

Sonia: Wait, you can help your family with financial problems?

Phan: Yes.

Sonia: Ah, do you have a big family back home?

Phan: No, I have one younger brother, and that's all. And my parents.

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*Homesickness and other family obligations are one thing. But there's also language...and not just not being able to speak one's native language. For Phan, for example, one of his biggest grievances with living in Shizuoka is that it's becoming harder for him to remember and use his English.*

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Phan: Since I come to Japan, I totally get rid of English and...one more thing that I hate about Japanese is the katakana...

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*Katakana, remember, is the Japanese writing system for foreign words. But only writing distinguishes katakana from hiragana, which is the basic writing system for Japanese words. The pronunciation is the same.*

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Phan: ...They're really ruining my English pronunciation. Just imagine that one day you woke up and you have to look at the calendar and you say, ah, today is Valentine's Day, but you speak it B alentine day, so some kind of mixture that really annoy me, and whenever I want to speak with the Japanese in English, I have to find a way to translate it into katakana, to make them get me easier. And that's really annoying.

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*Another thing these students have to deal with? Having a social life. Making friends.*

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Sonia: Was it difficult to make friends when you came?

Ria: To make friends...yeah. Even until now, I think. Maybe it's my time, but...especially to Japanese, I really, uh, have huge difficulties in finding a friend. I know many Japanese, but not like a friend as in, you can really call her anytime, and tell any of your problems to her or him. I haven't find, maybe. It's because I'm busy too, maybe. I don't know.

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Manasi: Like you know I told you, the Japanese are extremely different from what I am. I don't have many, other friends too. I mean, I do have friends, but not people I can really open up to. Because everybody is very busy here. And everyone wants to save money, they all want to go to university. They have a lot of pressure on them. As for me, I don't really have any pressure, you know? So I'm just learning the language. I just wanna have fun--and then go back. So, for other people, it's like, we don't really have time for that.

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*Manasi knows she's in Japan temporarily. But it's a major distinction from most of her classmates, who are here for the long run. They're trying to pass exams to enter Japanese universities or companies, or make money here to help their families back in their home countries. They're **busy**.*

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Manasi: So, that's why, I had a tough time, finding my kind of people. But somehow I did...which is one more thing that I realized about English. If the other person talks in English, somehow I can open up to them much more. Because then I can talk in the language where I can express myself *really*. As much as I try to, I'm not able to express myself to *that* level in Japanese yet. I mean, I'm not Japanese, so somehow, you know, I get this connection with the person who can talk in English. And I get along really fast. And somehow I just keep talking, talking, talking, so..

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*Like Manasi, Ria also has difficulties making friends in Japan...*

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Sonia: Do you think it's more communication or similarity in personality? Like, do you think your personality is that different from others, or do you think you can't communicate with others enough to know it?

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Ria: No, I just think because people are different...I just see things that...you cannot judge people as easy as that...so...I just need to understand the differences, that's all. I just think so. I think it goes the same...wherever you go.

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*So, in past episodes, we've talked about Japanese attitudes toward English and English speakers. Now that we know a little bit more about the lives of some foreign students studying Japanese in Shizuoka, let's look at this question from another angle.*

*English is a type of "foreign" something in Japan. But what about everything else? Other languages, other people...**these** foreign students with whom we've been talking. How do Japanese people react to them?*

*That's the topic for next week. Thank you to Manasi, Ria, and Phan. For Shizuoka Speaks, I'm Sonia Paul. Thank you for listening.*