

Being Shy

How many times have you heard Japanese people say they are shy? Many people use this reason for not speaking English. Shy is being uncomfortable or nervous with other people. Yes, many of us feel this way with the pressure of speaking English, but is there more to it?

Many foreigners enjoy speaking another language. Some want to use Japanese when staying in Japan. They don't mind if they make some mistakes. They just want to have a go and be hopefully understood.

In Japan, people have strong connections and responsibilities to other people. They learn to be aware of how other people see them. It is also important to try and do your best and not make mistakes. These cultural features add a lot of pressure to Japanese learners of English. They can become uncomfortable or nervous about being watched and making mistakes – that is, feel shy.

In many English speaking countries there are people from many different cultural backgrounds. They may not share the same beliefs or customs as those around them. To find a common ground, they use the tool of language, or English, to exchange what they need or think. How they speak that English is secondary to the goal of communication. This takes the pressure and 'shyness' off speaking English.

It could be useful next time you speak English to think of the culture connected to it. There are less rules and pressure than you think. The point is to express your own mind, learn more about others and the world and to enjoy it - even the mistakes!

Comedy Across Cultures

Here's a joke for you to enjoy:

(a.b.c のいずれか一つを選んで読んでください)

- a. Why was the number 6 sad? ... Because 7 ate 9.
- b. What can you catch but not throw?... A cold.
- c. What has many keys but can't unlock a door?... A piano.

Do you get it? The joke plays with different meanings for the same word in English.

Most people enjoy comedy. But what is funny to one person might not be funny for another. Comedy across countries can also be very different. Not only in language but in cultural understanding too.

It is said that comedy is finding something surprising. That surprise can be a twist in a story, a turn from cultural rules or something totally unexpected. Comedy that is simple, physical and about everyday life is most easily understood across people and cultures. Comedy that is rich in local customs or language is difficult to appreciate more widely.

Two main forms of Japanese comedy are manzai and rakugo. In manzai there are often two characters. One is usually very straight forward and the other is a bit silly. The misunderstandings between them makes it funny. Rakugo is traditional story telling with a surprising end.

Japanese and American audiences usually like direct and clear comedy. British and Australian people prefer comedy that might not seem funny at first until you think more deeply about it.

Comedy has different layers to understand. What makes people laugh is a reaction connected to their language and culture. You can try to find something funny and new from around the world. Or, why not tell a Japanese joke in English to get a laugh?

(音読モデルは 3 つとも読んでいます)

Fast Fashion

When you think of hamburgers, fries and pizza, the words 'fast food' may come to mind. What do you think of when you hear the words 'fast fashion'?

It's a new trend in society. People want to wear the latest fashion and often change their clothes. They like looking good and fresh on social media. Or, they want to look like their idols who regularly update their style. Some people just enjoy shopping, too.

Fashion companies want to match the pace of fashion. They make many copies of popular items and sell them for very cheap prices. Buying cheap clothes regularly sounds like a dream, but, it has many problems.

First, fashion companies keep their prices low by building factories in poorer countries. The workers get low salaries and work in difficult conditions.

Second, making a lot of clothes takes a lot of materials. This production is bad for the environment. And, if you wear a shirt a few times, because you want a new one or the quality is low, what happens to it? Many clothes like this become garbage and pollute the world. We must reduce this waste!

Third, many of the fast fashions look the same. There is not much originality. So even though people want to look different all the time, everyone ends up looking the same anyway. Cultural or individual diversity is much more interesting.

Of course, fashion is a good thing. It is natural for people to care about or enjoy the way they look. However, like 'fast food', be careful about the amount of 'fast fashion' you consume. That's good fashion sense.

Pronunciation Like A Pro

There are some words we use every day in Japan that are also used in English speaking countries. Can you think of any? Today, I want to talk about five of them. Sometimes the words sound similar but sometimes it is difficult to guess what the words mean.

The first word is the name of a fish. It is popular with mayonnaise in Japanese onigiri or sandwiches. It can also be called 'sea chicken'. Yes, that's right, ツナ. Americans pronounce it as 'two-na' while British pronunciation is 'chew-na'. Which do you like?

Another food word is チョコレート. The Japanese katakana for it is very bumpy with many vowel sounds. English speakers say it more straight, like 'chokk-let'.

Then there is the fast food restaurant with the 'M' logo. Know its name in English? 'Mkk-Dohh-neldz'. It's also called shorter names around the world like 'Micky-Ds' and 'Maccas'.

Finally, there are two Japanese words that are used in English speaking countries. Can you guess what they are? First is 'carry-o-key'. It's a popular way to relax, sing and have fun with your friends. People usually do it in a small room. Got it?

Yes, カラオケ.

For a more serious activity, why not try 'ku-ra-tea'? You'll need to learn many kicks, punches and blocks. Maybe you can get a black belt one day. That's right, it's カラテ

When learning a new language, it is always interesting and fun to discover new sounds. It is also important to try the local ways of pronunciation to help our communication be understood. Give it a go!