

## Living in the Spanish world.

### **Is it true that Spanish is a language to speak to God?**

Thank you for attending here at the time when people tend to avoid gathering under the Corona Pandemic. I think that most of you in this room have some relation with English or have some interest about the situation of the world.

What I am going to talk from now is not about English that is used most widely in the world but about Spanish that is spoken in more than 20 countries as mother tongue. Actually, from the viewpoint of mother tongue, the number of the countries where Spanish is spoken as mother tongue surpass the case of English.

Now, let me introduce the interesting culture and the way of living of people in Spanish world.

Probably, you may have heard the following episodes. A researcher of language says. "English is the language for business.", "French is for talking about art." "Germany is used in the field of medicine." "Italian is to talk with a horse." And "Spanish is to speak to God."

I'm not sure if this analysis is correct or not, but "English is most used language in the world of business" is true. Don't you think so? As for the phrase "Spanish is to speak to God", I think it comes from the fact that Spanish pronunciation is beautiful.

I was a correspondent of a newspaper in Panama for 10 years. During that time, I visited all the countries in Latin America. After my retirement, I studied abroad in Spain to improve my Spanish.

I first began to study Spanish at the age of 35. From that time on, I have had relations with Spanish world until now. Last year, I visited Panama with my wife, commemorating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our wedding, to extend our appreciations to Panamanians who had supported us during our stay in that country. Under such circumstance, I would like to accept willingly the analysis, "Spanish is to speak to God."

### **Spanish pronunciation is easier than English pronunciation.**

I have been asked many times by my Japanese friend. "Spanish is difficult to master, isn't it?" I would always answer on such occasion. "Yes, to study genuine Spanish is surely difficult, but if it is to use it in daily conversation, it will be easier than English."

This is because the vowels of Spanish, "a,e,i,o,u" is same as that of Japanese.

And in the case of English, we must pay attention to the pronunciation such as, "s" and "th", "f" and "v", "r and "l", and its accent.

In Spanish, however, you can read it as we pronounce Roman letters. Because the vowels of Spanish are same as that of Japanese, as I mentioned before.

Of course, Spanish has difficult pronunciation also.

The classification of "F" and "J", and to pronounce "R" with a quivering voice with the tongue entwined are important. But even though you cannot pronounce perfectly, your message will be understood. Frankly speaking, I am not good at pronouncing "R" even

now, but people have understood my Spanish.

However, when it comes to talking to high-ranking people and writing official letters, it will be more difficult than English. In Spanish, there are subjunctive mood and direct mood, and if we add tense one verb could be change more than 30 times.

In addition to these, it also has singular and plural, noun and adjective have male and female, and all of them must match (be concord) in the sentence.

From this point of view, I would like to say that to master Spanish is more difficult than English.

### **What a difficult thing to master Japanese!**

On the other hand, I think, also Japanese is very difficult language for foreigners to master.

Currently, I teach Japanese to foreign students in English at a local junior high school in Akishima City and I feel the difficulty of it every day.

As you know, there are three types of characters in Japanese. They are *hiragana*, *katakana* and *kanji*. Both *hiragana* and *katakana* have 50 characters, and they are required to learn more than 2000 *kanji* by the time they graduate from junior high school. And when they speak or write something, they must find an appropriate word to meet the person they talk or write to.

It is because Japanese society requires a humble expression of humility.

For example, there are nearly ten ways to express oneself.

*Watakushi, watashi, boku, ore, ware, uchi, temae, shousei, etc.*

*Watakushi* is a good and polite expression.

*Watashi* is comparatively good expression and used most in casual conversation.

*Boku, ore, ware*, are used by men. Within these, *boku* is more colloquial, *ore* is little polite and *ware* is old style expression.

*Uchi* is used by both gender (men and women).

*Temae* is used mainly in the letter and it is an expression with humility.

Again, what is important in Japan is the spirit of humility.

If you don't understand this well, people around you may say, "He is arrogant."

In Spanish, there is only one word to express oneself. It is "Yo". Same is true with English.

We have only one word to express oneself. It is "I". isn't it?

Of course, we have studied each other the way to speak or write with modesty in English, using verb and auxiliary verb, such as would, could, etc.

But I think it is not so complicated compared with the case of Japanese.

### **The world of "Hasta mañana"**

Now, I can say that one of the most used words in the Spanish world is "Hasta mañana".

This word generally means in English "Goodbye", "Bye bye" or "See you tomorrow".

But this word has other broad meanings and used at many situations.

The following is my live experience living and touching the skin with the local people in

Panama.

Shortly after I was assigned to Panama, the bureau office phone broke down.

There are no four seasons in Panama. It's a tropical savanna climate. There are only two seasons, the dry season when it does not rain at all and rainy season when it rains heavily almost every other day.

The day after this waterfall-like rain, the phone in the bureau office would go out of function. It seemed that water soaked into the cable line of the telephone and caused problems.

I made a phone call to telephone office from a public phone near the office and applied for repair. An officer who took my phone call said.

"I understood. I will report your request to the repair department."

The friendly answer made me relieved. I waited and waited. But the repair man did not come.

So, I dialed again to the telephone office. Then the officer said to me. "I reported it to the repair department. So, I think some staff will soon arrive at your house".

However, the person in charge of this day did not come. I had some emergency phone call to overseas country. I got a little frustrated and went back to my apartment.

Then my senior neighbor staying in Panama for a long time said to me smiling.

"You cannot expect the same thing as in Japan. This is a hot country all the year around. It is not good for health to work so hectically like you. I think you know the phrase "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." It is important to live slowly and comfortably in Latin America."

The next morning, I thought that my phone call only was not enough, so I went directly to the telephone office under the hot sun and talked to an officer with Japanese style talk and negotiations.

"I called you yesterday to repair the line of my telephone, but nobody has come yet. What a hell is going on?"

"Unfortunately, there was no person in charge."

"I'm in a hurry. I do hope you will send some person in charge as soon as possible."

"I understood. We will do our best. But if we cannot go today, it will be tomorrow, *Hasta manana*"

Yes, this word "tomorrow, *Hasta manana*" has brought me problem. It is true that we have tomorrow and we also have the day after tomorrow. We should not be so impatient here.

Luckily, my telephone was repaired in the afternoon of this day. It was because my Panamanian friend who has a friend at the top of the telephone office made a special arrangement.

When I studied abroad in Spain, it was same at the telephone installation in my apartment. It was terribly slow. It took four days for installation that should have been

done in two days after the application. The communication with the staff of the telephone office was almost same as in Panama.

I'm strangely convinced that "Hasta manana" is a very practical and useful phrase common to all Spanish -speaking countries.

### **The principle of five "A"**

Under such circumstance, I devised the following five principles of "A" to live in harmony with the people in local area of Latin America.

They are *aserazu*, *awatezu*, *akusekusezu*, *atenisezu*, and *akiramezu*. Each word of these has its meaning in English.

Don't rush, don't panic, don't be crazy, don't count on and don't give up.

It is interesting that the first letter of these five Japanese words begins with "A", but it is a pity that it is impossible to translate this fun in English or Spanish.

Anyway, as long as you keep this principle in your mind, you will feel at least less frustrating and less get annoyed.

Here, it is important to have a relaxed lifestyle like a sombrero that flies by the wind.

"Hasta manana" sometimes means to postpone the work until tomorrow, but it doesn't mean not to do the things you are asked to do.

In that sense, it can be said to be an elegant word that does not hurt the other person or yourself.

If you jump in with a Japanese-style rhythm in such an easy-going society of "Hasta manana", it may be natural that the gears of time do not mesh and the gears are chipped or idle.

### **Is time the master or human being the master?**

It's not uncommon for airplanes to be delayed by an hour or two hours when traveling in Latin America. But passengers don't pick up and wrinkle. There is a feeling it will move someday.

What Latin Americans who visit Japan uniformly report is the accuracy of transportation time, town's safety, and orderly events.

Many complicated system trains in Tokyo arrive and depart every several minutes. The Shinkansen train vehicles stop perfectly at the boarding place of the station which arrive nearly every ten minutes. These may be close to the divine work for Latin American people.

On the other hand, for Latin Americans, it may seem strange that the Japanese walk silently from the bus stop to the train station, from the platform to the boarding gate, as if ordered by this transportation system.

I once heard an episode like this.

A Bolivian who watched a horde of humans in the same black suites going out of the station at commuting time, rushed out crying, "Battle begins!"

Anyway, faithfulness and diligence of Japanese people are clearly shown in the work of

expatriates of trading companies and manufactures working in companies that have expanded overseas.

If it is time to finish work in Latin America, even if the work is in the middle, they will raise it. The remaining work will be passed on tomorrow with the word “Hasta mañana”. It is more important to enjoy one’s life than continuing work.

This is not the case, however, for expatriate from Japan. It is true that there is a problem of time difference in communication with the head office in Tokyo, but most of the offices in buildings that are lit until late at night were the Nikkei function.

For example, the time difference between Panama and Japan is 14 hours. So, if he wants to have contact with the boss of the Tokyo head office during daytime work in Japan, he must make a phone call in the middle of the night.

They have one more phrase like “Hasta mañana”.

It is “Poco a poco”. It’s a temperament word that makes it fun. It means “a little by little” in English.

I think this phrase is also perfect to describe the lives of Spanish -speaking people.

If I dare to say, it may be taken as following,

“Human is the master and time is servant” in Latin America and “Time is the master and human is servant” in Japan.

Currently, trains in Tokyo are relatively vacant for fear of corona infectious diseases.

But when I watched TV by satellite relayed in Panamá, the commuting scenery of Tokyo, the scenery of passengers trying to get on the crowded train, made me think which is more humanistic life compared with the living way of “Hasta mañana” in Latin America?

### **Modest Japanese gestures**

By the way, the richness of expressions and gestures of Spanish-speaking people is often overwhelming. This is true not only in Latin America but also in Spain, the home of Spanish.

Last year, I introduced some episodes about hug and kiss in my speech titled “Different country, different culture”, citing my own experience. But let me refer to it again today, because it was one of the most happy and impressive memories in my life of study abroad in Spain.

I invited my classmates of Malaga University to lunch at my apartment. My wife and I prepared many kinds of foods including Japanese dish, sushi.

They were from Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, and the U.S., 5 girls and one boy student who were studying Spanish at the university with me. You can find a photo on the resume.

When they visited us and entered my apartment room I hugged and kissed each one of the beautiful young girls and shake hands with a boy from Italy. At that time, I was 62 years old but I felt crush of my heart. At the time they went back, I kissed and hugged them again.

It is an unthinkable custom in Japan. But, if I don't do this, even if I invite them and serve them a treat, they will feel they are not really welcomed.

One more episode.

Once, when I was invited to a party, a female writer rushed to the venue late. She went around the room and kissed all the dozens who were there. And she said, "If I don't finish the kiss, I won't even be able to drink the delicious wine." This is a typical Spanish culture.

I feel that meeting by hitting body temperature is far more warmer and affective than the Japanese style greeting, that is lower head each other with a space of about 2 meters distance between the two persons.

Now, I think it is also true that these kisses and hot hugs have been one of the factors behind the spread of the coronavirus infection these days. We remember that in early days of Covid19 pandemic, there were many infected people in countries in Europe such as Spain, Italy and France. Because in these countries kissing and hugging are the most habitual and rooted custom in society.

At this moment, there are many infected people in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico. The people in these counties also have customs of kissing and hugging. But in addition to this custom, there are many factors such as the economical difference between rich and poor, poor medical system and more other various factors.

Also, when people speak Spanish, they use their hands, face, or whole body to express it. On the contrary, however, Japanese gestures are modest. This may have been cultivated by tradition. In Japan, modest attitude has been taken as a virtue.

Like these examples, when a place changes, the language, life, and customs will also change.

By the way, I prepared more script about "Football enthusiasm compared to baseball" and "Latin American songs focused on Tango and Samba", but the time is passing, so let me conclude my speech here.

Thank you very much for your attendance.

Now, as a token of my appreciation to your attendance today, let me present a song, "Besame mucho", song in Mexico, one of the most noted Latin American songs in Japan.

It is a love song and "Besame mucho" means "Kiss me much" in English.

The content of the lyrics is "My lover goes far away. So, kiss me a lot tonight as if it is last night."

This costume I'm wearing is a poncho and this is called sombrero.

Several decades ago, Torio Los Panchos used to wear and sing the song in Japan.

Now, please enjoy.

(The English of this text has been kindly checked by my English friend.)