

# “How I have mastered two foreign languages”

## Experience at a Meeting of the International Division

January 11, 2000



First of all, let me introduce myself. I was a correspondent of the Seikyo Shimbun in Panama from 1976 to 1985. During that time I had the opportunity to visit all of the countries in Latin America. After I returned to Japan from Panama, I was working in the foreign news department of the head office of Seikyo Shimbun in Tokyo.

Today's meeting is International Division's, so I would like to share my experience focusing on how I have managed to study foreign languages and I would like to talk about what I am holding now in my heart.

I was 34 years old when I began to study Spanish for the first time from the very beginning. With the increase of news from around the world, the foreign news department was newly formed in the Seikyo Shimbun.

The department was composed of 4 staff workers, so we divided the world into 4 areas--North America and Oceania, Central and South America, Europe and Africa, and Asia-- and assigned each of us to one area. I was the only one of the 4 who had not graduated from the university specializing in foreign languages and who was not fluent in English.

I graduated from Waseda University and I majored in bookkeeping and accounting. The second foreign language I took at the university was German. After I graduated, I worked for NHK Gakuen High School as a teacher for three years, teaching bookkeeping and then entered Seikyo Shimbun.

I could speak English to a certain degree, but my English was below that of the others. Therefore, I told them. "If you don't mind I will take charge of Central and South America where they don't speak English".

When I began to write articles for the Seikyo Shimbun, I noticed that sometimes I had to translate letters or newspapers written in Spanish. I hadn't even a slight knowledge about Spanish, so I would go to Mr. Y who was working for the overseas department of the Soka Gakkai. He was expert in Spanish. Handing the letter or the newspaper in Spanish to him, I would say. "Mr. Y, would you please translate this to Japanese?"

It was very fortunate for me to have a friend like him who collaborated with me in translating them. As time passed, however, I began to feel "It is not good to keep asking him. I myself should challenge to translate them so far as I can." Then I began to study Spanish as an absolute beginner.

It was pretty difficult to master Spanish when in my thirties. The conjugation of verbs was complicated for a beginner. I began to have the feeling. "I need to go to school to ask a teacher about the basic points at least". I was busy, however, in the evening participating in YMD activities. But in the daytime some of us had free time because we were allowed to be away from office even during working time on the condition that we present the required articles.

So I said to my boss, "I would like to go to school to study Spanish in the day time". The boss said, "Basically, I can admit your going to school, but to make sure you had better write a hokokusho, a report about this issue".

I wrote a hokokusho explaining my situation and the necessity of studying

Spanish and presented it to my boss. After several days I received an answer to my hokokusho. It was a great surprise because the hokokusho had been handed even to President Ikeda. I had never expected that. Furthermore, his comment made me even more surprised. He said, "It is amusing to have such an unusual staff member in the Honbu. OK, let him study as hard as he wishes".

Under such circumstances, I went to the Spanish school which was located just in front of the Shinano-machi station, two times a week, for two hours a day. As for the tuition, I paid by myself, of course.

When about 10 months had passed, the Honbu decided that a correspondent in Panama was needed. Then, they appointed me to that position. The fact that I was studying Spanish became the main reason and factor for choosing me for that position.



I was 35 years old then. This meant a great and radical change in my family's life. We have many dramatic stories behind this but I dare not refer to them because that would lend me away from the theme of my talk.

Anyway, upon arriving in Panama, I was forced to struggle with Spanish. The Japanese language was useless in Panama society, of course. I didn't have any interpreter, either. Even under such circumstances, it was fortunate that there were some leaders who could handle English because the Panama Canal was under control of the United States of America and many Panamanian were working there. (Panama Canal was returned to Panama from US at the end of 1999)

In the first year, I tried to speak in English and asked a leader to translate it in Spanish. When a member asked a question in Spanish I asked someone to translate it into English and to translate my answer in English into Spanish for the member.

From the second year on, I tried to speak in Spanish at any rate. Meanwhile I went to a Spanish language school, finding spare time outside of work and activities. They taught Spanish in English at this school.

The most effective study of Spanish was in editing the organ newspaper in Panama. The articles that I wrote were corrected in various ways. The red letters of correction were like a treasure for me as I continued on the way to mastering Spanish.

From 1983 to 1984, I wrote a series with the title "Living in Latin America" in Seikyo Shimbun. It lasted one year and appeared 50 times. On this occasion I made my article printed in Spanish, too, with members' support, in the local newspaper in Panama, "La Estrella de Panama". I am convinced that it played a meaningful role in the exchange of culture between both countries.

And in 1981, when President Ikeda made a visit to Panama for the second time, I wrote a big article about the culture exchange that the SGI was promoting. It was printed in full two pages of La Estrella de Panama with many pictures. As Panama is a small country, I had chance to talk with president or ministers in covering activities as correspondent. Thanks to these activities, I have come to have the courage to talk with all kinds of people in Spanish, even though my Spanish is not perfect and has grammatical errors.

I had a chance to visit all of the countries of Latin America during my 10- year stay in Panama and then returned to Japan.

Back in Japan, I began to work again in the foreign news department of the

Seikyo Shimbun. I had many interviews with foreigners, some of whom were SGI members and others who were not but were noted figures in their professional field. I was also dispatched again to Panama and to Central American countries, this time for short periods.

Then I was appointed chapter chief of Santamerica as the ex-chapter chief had gone back to the United States. One of the reasons was that I am living in Akishima City close to the Yokota Air Base.

When I began to use English again in Japan I felt that the language that is used most widely in Japan and in the world is English. In daily activities, I have felt that the more I improve my English the better I can understand what the members try to transmit to me and I can transmit to them more correctly the essence of the Goshō and the guidance of President Ikeda.



At the broadcasted monthly headquarters leaders meeting, I interpret some part of leaders' guidance to English utilizing speech's texts in Japanese. Here, too, I feel the more I raise the level of my English the more swiftly and correctly I can prepare the interpretation. Consequently, the harder I study, the more I can contribute to Kosen-rufu. This is the conclusion that I draw based on my own experience.

So I began to study English again in my 50's. Then I noticed that it was important to find out objectively, what my English level was. I took the STEP test and the TOEIC.

I feel shame at the result to you who are experts in English. But for me, the result was far better than I had expected. My TOEIC score was 835 and I attained the lower first level on the STEP test. When studying something, it's better to aim for the highest level. Now I am determined to achieve 860 points on the TOEIC, which is considered the top level, and to pass the upper level STEP test.

If you would allow me to refer to my own future plans, I would like to say that my experience so far will serve as the foundation for my life after my retirement and the foundation for contributing to world wide Kosen-rufu. I apologize for referring even to my private life plan, but my retirement year is coming soon.

What should I do after I retire? I am planning to go abroad again, if the situation permits. This time, however, it will be not because of company orders because I really want to go. I have three motives. Those are:

1. I want to go study abroad.
2. I want to contribute to Kosen-rufu at the place where I live.
3. The cost of living is cheaper than in Japan.

From the time when Christopher Columbus reached the New Continent 500 years ago, Christianity has been propagated all over the world. Behind this wide propagation there were many missionaries, even in the villages of Andes or in Africa.

Worldwide propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism has a history of barely 50 years.

The novel New Human Revolution describes how the seed of the Mystic Law was planted and nourished in various countries.

For example, in the United States, Japanese women who married to American soldiers first began to propagate this Buddhism. In South American countries, immigrant farmers became the pioneers. In Germany, the youth from Japan who worked in mines promoted shakubuku activities. Then, businessmen or scholars who were

dispatched to overseas countries also became promoters of Kosen-rufu activities. These were the ways Japanese people played an important role in the history of Kosen –rufu in each country and in each period.

The life span of human beings has become long. The time has come when ordinary person can live 80 years and the question of how to manage life after retirement and how to find a life worth living is being discussed.

Here is my proposal!  
life worth living overseas?  
Japan!"

Why do I propose  
many countries where you  
pension and there are many  
pension is much more than

What I mentioned until now is for elderly people and I would talk with them while drinking.



“Why don’t you try to find a  
You needn’t stick to life in

this? Because there are  
can live life well with your  
countries where your  
adequate.

To young people, I would like to say, “Challenge yourselves to become experts in the foreign language you are studying”.

For example, it is quite natural that most of the young staff of the editing department of the Seikyo Shimbun can manage English at least. If he can manage English, he can even manage an interview or a discussion with some foreigners who speak another language, like French, Spanish, Chinese, by using English as the common language. I say this based on my own experience.

If you can do your work without an interpreter you can save time and money. Using interpreters costs double and cuts the content, what we can talk about, in half!

If we can work without interpreters, the person we speak with will feel more relaxed because he needs not wait for an interpretation. I have heard many requests to improve the situation from overseas members. I myself feel that necessity, too.

I am convinced in this sense that the linguistic development of each member and the increase of the membership of the International Division will become more and more important in the future.

Lastly I would like to report what I am doing now, actually. As for English, I am listening to English cassette tapes daily and trying to read as many newspapers or magazines or books in English as possible.

I might be saying incoherent thing. My speech expanded widely from my frank experience to what I am holding daily in my heart and even to a dream-like story. But I would be very happy if some part of my talk would be any help to you and would become enlightening for you. Thank you very much.