

Yan Ying (Candy) Luo
San Francisco – Osaka Sister City Association
August 21, 2014

Language is Not a Barrier

My journey to Osaka proved to me that we have to grasp our opportunities if we wish to turn our dreams into realities. From the moment when I received news that I was one of the chosen ambassadors, I entered into a dream. I entered into my childhood dream of embarking on a journey to Japan. Upon setting foot in Osaka, at the airport where Ms. Kido picked me up and started speaking to me in Japanese, I realized that my dream had turned into reality. As a fan of anime, manga, J-pop, sakuras, Japanese culture and food, I could hardly contain my excitement upon arrival. I anticipated for the journey that lay ahead—which would no doubt be life changing. With that anticipation came fear, fear that I would not be able to follow up on what people were saying due to my limited knowledge of Japanese, which I had acquired over the years through the act of self-teaching. My fear was proved invalid by the kindness of everyone in Osaka; each person that I met acted with thoughtfulness, asking me questions periodically to make sure that I was able to understand them. Thus I had no problems with communication during my stay. However, it was a bit of challenge for me to speak to others in Japanese since I've never actually had a real conversation with anyone in Japanese in real life. Though I do talk to a few friends in Japanese online, I came to realize that it is very different than when you actually speak the language aloud to others. It's analogous to having a perfect monologue with yourself in Japanese in your mind, but when you actually engage in a dialogue in Japanese with someone in real life with your limited knowledge on Japanese, the dialogue doesn't go so perfectly. Yet why does that matter when we can all understand each other? The answer is that it doesn't. Here's why.

My first impression of Osaka is how polite and kind every individual was, in addition to the cleanness of the streets, houses, stores, and environment in comparison to all the other places that I've been to in my life. At first glance one may notice the lack of trashcans on streets whilst in Osaka, but one will also notice how clean Osaka is. Every corner of Osaka was spotless, the roads shining and the rivers reflecting an identical image of the sparkling city. Such an observation will lead one to wonder, just how do Osaka's residents keep their city so clean, so environmentally friendly, and so beautiful? In attempt to find an answer to this question, I began asking people around me until I finally discovered the secret behind the city's cleanness: Osaka's residents actually throw their trash away in garbage cans found in indoor shopping streets or at subway stations which occupy the city everywhere. I was awestruck at the city's orderly conduct— Osaka is a place where everyone followed the rules and morals of the society, thus creating one the most beautiful, clean, and friendly cities in the world. Every person that I met along the way tried to help me out with all their might. Even if they didn't understand, they would try to understand through using body image to show me images of what they think I was saying or they would direct me to someone else—like a police officer or street guard, in hopes of helping me even by a bit. This made me realize that language is not a barrier—that even if we speak different languages, we can still understand each other

perfectly. I did not feel for a moment that I was lost while in Japan; I always felt welcomed and embraced by the friendliness and hospitality of the people.

In conclusion, I have learned that with a bit of effort and a smile, along with politeness and kindness, we can understand each other regardless of what language we speak. Even if Osaka has its own dialect as Tokyo has its own dialect, Osaka's residents still understand Tokyo-ben. The same applies for English versus Japanese. With a strong desire to understand each other, we will be able to understand each other, whether those thoughts are expressed through emotions, body language, or language itself. Don't let language be a barrier; grab your opportunities and turn your dreams into reality.