



Graffiti in Milan, Italy (2012)

# LANGUAGE AND RACISM

**March 4, 2015**

*Greg and José were just before discussing communication problems that some people have in Japan because of their problems understanding both language and culture. These people Greg refers to as “them”.*

studying and doing my PhD there. I’m surrounded by younger uh, (Expatriates?) No new people, (Japanese) **Newbies** newbies newbie foreigners.

Greg O’Keefe: You can’t explain it to them because then if they- very few Japanese will explain it to them and (Yeah yeah) It’s just it’s kind of like a- it’s real- to be quite honest it’s almost like a non-subject in many ways because you can’t- it’s, some people either understand it or they don’t understand it. And I’m not trying to put those people down or anything, it’s just- it’s just kind of beyond that- you can’t really have that conversation, that uh...

José: Newbie foreigners, so “**expats**”, OK.

Greg: So... they’re not really expats they’re just students really from other schools (Ahh OK) because I’m doing- Like I’m studying- this is...

José: Well I call them, I like to say “expats” because I can’t get myself to say “foreigner” And I don’t want to say “gaijin” because we’re speaking in English.

José Cruz: I- if the person is self-aware and they know that they’re prone to that (Yeah) then you can approach it gingerly, and say, “Oh by the way you don’t actually have to say, “*doumo arigatou gozaimasu*” EVERY time, (Yeah) you know, you you don’t have to- because that actually sounds- (I don’t know about this) that’s a little off-putting to the Japanese if you do that every time” and they go, “Oh but why is that? Isn’t that the most polite thing?” “Yeah but you see the thing about politeness is that ‘**na na na**’ ”. I get jaded and I don’t really want to help anymore, and I think that’s the deal that you were talking about just now.

Greg: Well you could say, non-Japanese, uh I know...

José: Well actually that’s a good question, I’ll ask your opinion on that. I’m seeing more and more on Facebook- and not just the expats living in Japan saying the word “foreigner” more easily, but when I was growing up in Canada, the word foreigner was essentially um a a discriminatory word. (Yeah it is) To refer to somebody as a foreigner, “Oh you foreigners don’t know nuthin’ about ‘Murica!’ (‘Murica!) And it was it was a discriminatory word. And now people are throwing it around as if it’s an OK thing to say. (Well) And I don’t know if this is just me being 53 years old, you know.

Greg: Yeah, it’s true. It is, It’s just exactly like that. I often feel because I’m at the university. I’m

Greg: It's desensitizing themselves to the words (**Could be**) I mean I've done it. I'm guilty of that I- I don't- you know it's the way it's used is really important (Could be) And I think also so many people see that as an almost- even they don't like being called it, and uh, nobody will call you a foreigner in English. Usually only the expats call themselves foreigners. Like you don't have a Japanese person actually calling you the word foreigner. (When I get-) It's always it's "gaikokujin" or "gaijin", right?

José: Well no when I, OK, In Japanese no they won't (they won't) because number one they're not speaking English properly and they will call you gaijin, but I hate even more the term gaikokujin please don't say that to my face. That's just false politeness. (I know) And the thing is tho' I use the word gaijin in Japanese, because Japanese is another matter entirely. The word gaijin is not necessarily discriminatory, but the word foreigner definitely is.

Greg: I agree. I agree. It's true. You know, when it comes to my Japanese friends, and if they're calling me "gaijin san" or "gaijin" or "gaikokujin" I always ask them, where am I from? And they always say, "oh you're from America". And I say well...

José: Well then **friggin'** say that! Haha.

Greg: Well that's right. And I say, "you know something tho'" I say, "why don't you, from now on when you meet someone from a different country (Yeah) find out what country they're from and say, 'what about Americans, what do they do?'" They, yeah- It's better to say that. I'd rather I'd rather have them ask me that but if- you know, I'm not the same as someone from Zimbabwe or Nigeria. (Exactly) So really don't throw me in the same group.

José: Don't don't don't ask my opinion to represent the other 99.999% of the world.

Greg: I don't want to make the Nigerians look bad.

José: Sure because, or they might make me look good. And I turn it around to my kids too, OK If you call me "gaijin" again in English, you know what I'm going to call? I'm going to call you, "**Ajajin**". (Ajajin) I'm going to call you Ajajin, OK. I'm going to call you Ajajin. I'm going to put you- I'm going to lump you in a salad bowl with the Vietnamese, the Nepalese, the Chinese, and the Mongolians and you're going to have to represent all of them.

Word count	Time	Words/Min.
833	210	238.00

Pointers:

**Na na na:** said in this way, it indicates a dislike for the remaining part of what is being said. (0:40)

**Newbies:** a slang term for people who are new to something. (0:59)

**Could be:** short for "it could be" (1:55)

**Friggin':** a more acceptable form of swearing. (2:47)

**Ajajin:** José is being pejorative by using the Japanese word for "Asian". (3:20)

Discussion:

What problems do you have in communication because of culture or language?

How is the word "foreigner" thought of in your language? Is it considered a bad word?

Is racism a problem in your country?

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