

Body Language

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Ages: 13–18 years old
Level: Beginning–Advanced
Culture: Japanese nonverbal behavior
Japanese: Greetings, small talk, etc.

Objectives

In this lesson, I introduce some of the most typical Japanese behavior patterns that can be taught at the introductory level of language study: how to convey greetings (bowing), how to conduct a conversation (eye contact, nodding, responses, smiling), and how Japanese behave when they say *sayōnara*. Also taught were direct and polite expressions—concepts needed for thinking about who you are conversing with and under what circumstances.

Nurturing the ability to make proper adjustments is a very important part of foreign language acquisition. Learning a foreign language (especially one like Japanese, which has developed in a cultural milieu that differs greatly from the learners' mother tongue) is a process of creating a different self—an enjoyable task but also a stressful experience.

Characteristically, Japanese behavior and thinking are very noticeable when talking with Japanese people, and they tend to cause misunderstandings between Americans and Japanese. Moreover, these behavior patterns are not such that learners can master them immediately after one lesson. Because they are difficult, it is necessary to work gradually from the introductory stage to draw learners' attention to them and get students accustomed to using them to facilitate switching back and forth between the American speaking mode and the mode for Japanese speakers. It is also a good opportunity to make students realize that learning Japanese means learning with the whole body, including gestures and facial expressions.

Materials and Procedure

1. Review
Practice of *konnichiwa*, *konbanwa*, and *sayōnara*. Using pictures for situational cues, each phrase is practiced along with bows.
2. Explanation of the Day's Objectives
Teacher: "Have you ever seen (in real life or in the movies) or met a Japanese person? If so, did you notice anything about the person's gestures? (What did you find interesting, strange, or different?) Today we are going to learn some Japanese customs that are very different from those of Americans."
3. Eye Contact
Ask where Americans direct their line of vision when talking to someone. Ask students if they sensed anything about the line of vision of Japanese they had seen in the movies (such as what the subordinate *samurai* did when the *shōgun* appeared) or in real life. Have them read Handout #1 to learn about the differences in line of vision of Americans and Japanese and tell them about the following cases:
 - a. Once when I was introduced to a minister, he looked me in the eyes so long that I became embarrassed and shifted my gaze away from his. Even though I knew that in the United States it is good manners to return the other person's gaze, I was unable to do so.
 - b. An American friend of mine was teaching in an

English conversation school in Japan. A girl in one of his classes was very quiet, so he tried to get her adjusted to the class by making a point of speaking to her in English when he met her in the hall. The girl apparently misunderstood his intentions, for after that she gave him presents and started knitting him a sweater. His eye contact was probably one reason for the misunderstanding.

- c. When Japanese students go for job interviews, they are advised to look at the interviewer's collar or necktie.

4. Responses and Nodding

Demonstrate a response and get students to think about things like what it means, why it is necessary, whether they had noticed that I nod frequently, and how often Americans respond this way. After this, read the rest of Handout #1 and then practice the word *hai* together with nodding. Get them to converse (in English) with the teacher or a classmate and practice nodding.

5. "How are you doing?"

Americans frequently ask how to say "How are you doing?" in Japanese. Have students read and understand Handout #2. Also tell them that the Japanese smile has many different meanings and relate Lafcadio Hearn's comments on the Japanese smile referring to *Nippon—The Land and its People* (Gakusei-sha, 1984) pp. 331 and 339. American students find it hard to believe that the Japanese endeavor to put on a smile even when they are sad.

6. *Sayōnara*

Have them read Handout #3 and review the pronunciation of *sayōnara*. Have the students take the parts of host and guest and practice a situation in which the guest departs from the host's home. Have them go out of the classroom and keep looking back and repeating *sayōnara* until they can no longer see each other.

7. *Ohayō* and *Ohayō gozaimasu* (Direct and Distal Style)

The teacher demonstrates and has the students guess the difference between *Ohayō* and *Ohayō gozaimasu*. Show photographs and pictures that include information about the person and have students greet the figures pictured. Have students read Handout #4 about direct and distal style and get them to understand the definitions of these terms. Apply this by having students consider a particular situation (Handout #5) and raise their hands to indicate which style they think should be used: Who thinks it should be direct? Who thinks it should be polite?

Explain that in some situations the proper style is clear, but in others either is acceptable and usage depends on the personal style of the speaker. Tell the students that there are some Japanese who, because they prefer to use the direct style, are considered lighthearted and easy to get to know, but whose intentions are frequently misunderstood. Also tell the students about the strict rules that govern superior-subordinate relations in club activities in Japanese schools (especially in sports clubs) and about the saying found in Japanese universities that "freshman are insects, sophomores are trash, juniors are people, and seniors are gods."

8. Closure

Have the students discuss what factors are important in learning Japanese and make them aware of the importance of learning the gestures and other body language that should accompany what they say.

9. Homework

Write five examples each of situations in which the direct and polite styles should be used. Be specific about who you are talking to under what circumstances.

Handouts

#1 Culture—Bowing (*ojigi*), Nodding (*unazuki and aizuchi*), and Eye Contact

When you greet a Japanese, you need to bow or nod. It depends on whom you are exchanging greetings with. Japanese never kiss or hug each other as a greeting. Please do not take it as coldness. It is just a different custom. When you greet people to whom you have to show respect, such as elders, you need to bow. When you meet your close friends or classmates (people of your age), you nod, saying, "Ohayō."

When you bow or nod, where are you looking? When you are greeting English-speaking people, where are you looking? English speakers look at people's eyes, but Japanese speakers do not look at people's eyes in greeting. It is rude, bold, or embarrassing to look straight into people's eyes for the Japanese. Again, it is different custom.

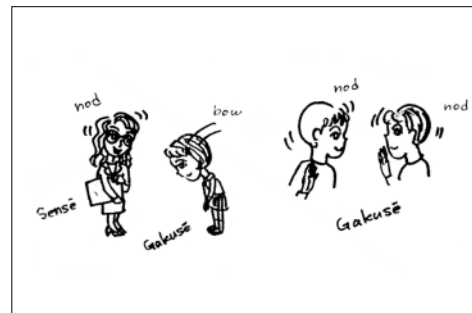


Nodding is a light way of bowing. It is also used to show that you are listening or that you understand what the other person is saying. On the telephone since nodding can't be seen, the Japanese say "Hai (Yes)" a lot in order to let the speaker know that they understand. English speakers sometimes see this as unnecessary. On the other hand, when Japanese speak with an English speaker, they wonder if the English

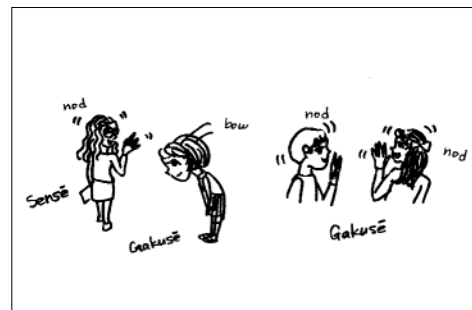
speaker understands what they are saying. When Japanese do not get enough feedback from English speakers, they feel insecure or uncomfortable.



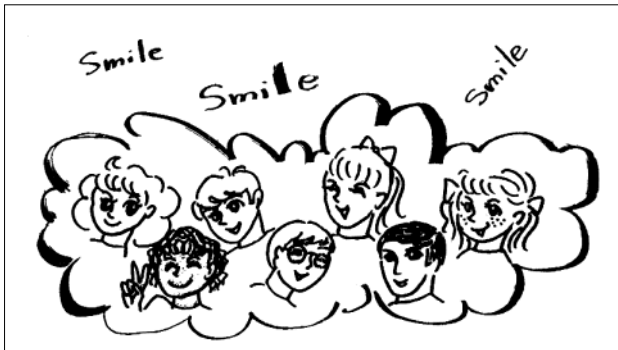
- 1. *Konnichiwa* Hello (at around noon or afternoon before it gets dark)
- 2. *Konbanwa* Hello (after dark)



- 3. *Sayōnara* Goodbye. So long.



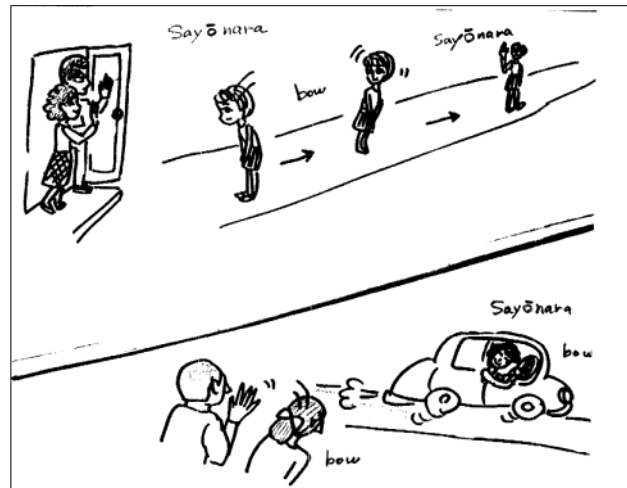
#2 "How are you doing?"



In the United States people often say "How are you doing?" when they see each other. Even when they meet a couple hours later, some say, "How are you?" again. This phrase is often mistranslated as "*Ogenki desu ka*" in Japanese. When Japanese say "*Ogenki desu ka*" they mean "How have you been doing?" If you have not seen a person for a long while, you can say "*Ogenki desu ka.*" However, it sounds strange if you say this phrase to a person you met only a few hours ago or even a few days ago. Thus there is no such phrase or custom in Japan to say "How are you doing (now or today)?" Then what is the appropriate greeting, you may ask. Just say "*Konnichiwa*" and smile! Your smile means that you are doing fine today.

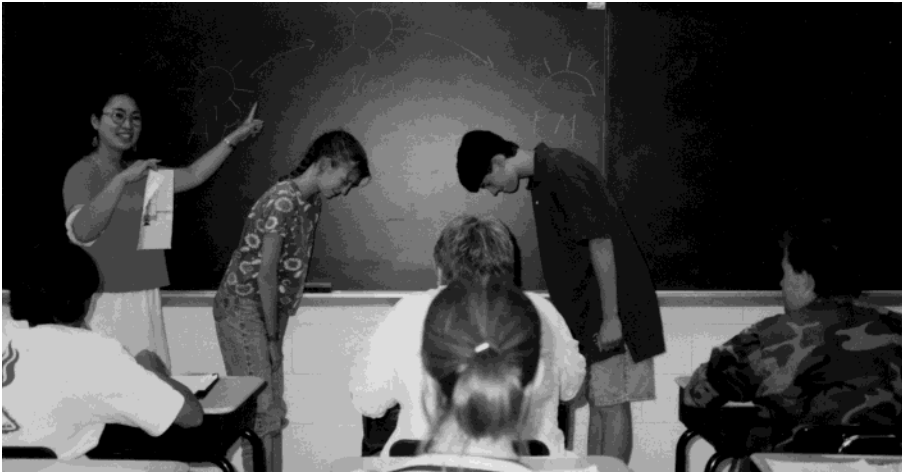
#3 *Sayōnara*

In some ways, the way in which English speakers say goodbye strikes Japanese as cold, for they never look back to say goodbye again. They just walk away or, as hosts, shut the door immediately after their guests leave. The Japanese usually see people off until their guests are no longer in sight. The guests are also expected to wave or sometimes look back and bow again to respond to the polite farewell of the hosts staying outside to see them off.



#4 Direct-style vs. Distal-style

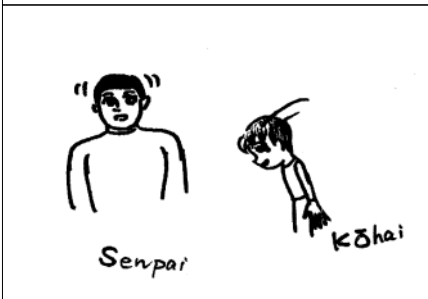
There is no neutral style in Japanese language. Speakers have to change speech style according to who they are talking to. This requires constant attention for speakers. When you are speaking to your teachers, strangers, seniors, etc., you have to use distal-style, which indicates that speakers are showing some amount of distance between themselves and the addressee, rather than talking directly, casually, intimately, abruptly, or carelessly (direct-style). This style is the safest style for foreign adult speakers. On the other hand, the direct style is the opposite of the distal. The Japanese start learning direct-style first, since it is easier to use and also because very young children are not expected to know all manners and social expectations. Thus, this style is easily found among young people who are still learning social customs and expectations. Japanese youngsters learn distal-style gradually, especially at school club activities, where the seniors are very strict on juniors about using the appropriate speech style. Direct-style is also used among families with whom you can be frank.



1. *Ohayō* (direct) Hello, in the morning



2. *Ohayō gozaimasu* (distal)



3. *Oyasumi.* (direct) Goodbye. Goodnight. Good dreams. (You use this phrase late at night when you assume that the other person is also going to bed after you separate from each other.)
4. *Oyasumi nasai.* (distal)



#5 Applications

Do you use distal-style or direct-style in the situations below?

1. You are talking to your *senpai* (senior at school) whom you like very much.
2. You are talking to your Japanese mother in your homestay family.
3. You are talking to your Japanese teacher whom you have known for a long time.
4. You are talking to your *senpai* (senior at school) at a club meeting.
5. You are talking to your *senpai* in the hallway of the school.

6. You are talking with your classmate during lunch break.
7. You are talking to your classmate in classroom discussion.
8. You are talking with your *kōhai* at a club meeting.
9. You are talking with a *kōhai* in the hallway of the school.
10. You are talking with your classmate whom you do not usually talk with.
11. You are introduced to your friend's friend. This person seems to be very shy. Which style do you use first?
12. You are asked to make a speech about your hometown to people of your age.
13. You are studying privately with your classmates after class to prepare for a final exam.
14. You meet a mother of your friend on the street.
15. You are speaking to the owner of a grocery store where you usually go to buy goods. He is using direct-style. He is in his fifties.
16. You are talking to a store clerk to buy something.
17. Please think of other situations you may encounter in Japan and decide which style you need to use to speak to a Japanese.

Culture and the Foreign Language Class

In American primary and secondary schools, foreign language learning is recognized as an important enrichment experience for growing learners. It is thought to expand their horizons, nurture tolerance of different countries and people, and foster a desire to learn from them; it also provides an opportunity to make students more aware of their own culture. It is therefore tacitly accepted and mandatory that culture be taught along with language. Thus far, information about Japanese culture (such as flower arrangement, martial arts, or paper folding) has been taken up frequently and has come to be incorporated in the social studies curriculum, but this sort of information alone makes it difficult for learners to experience Japanese culture and ways of thinking. Learning the language is a good opportunity for such experience.

Some students who study Japanese in Japan learn only expressions on the direct level. After they

return to the United States and start working, however, their Japanese ability does not mature. When such a person addresses the boss with "*Jā mata ne*" as he or she leaves the office for the day, the person addressed, and other people in the office as well, feel strange and somewhat ashamed. Japanese people tend to overlook improper use of the language by foreigners, but by doing so they are depriving motivated learners—people genuinely interested in Japan—of an opportunity to experience Japanese ways of thinking. When speakers have not learned the proper behavior patterns that accompany the use of the Japanese language, this kind of imbalance occurs.

One also sees speakers whose gestures and facial expression create an atmosphere that does not fit the meaning of what they are saying in Japanese. Actions and behavior that we usually pay little attention to, and the discord that arises when the Japanese teacher corrects the learner, are all good experiences for the students. In the future these students may work in an American subsidiary of a Japanese company, or find that their boss, colleagues, customers, or neighbors are Japanese. It is useful for them to experience now the conflicts and misunderstandings that may arise in such situations in the future.

This is not to say that they should agree with or master Japanese customs and ways of thinking. The object is to enable them to adjust properly so as not to offend Japanese people or cause mis-understanding. The study of Japanese is valuable because, even if students forget the language itself, it will enable their minds and bodies to switch into the Japanese-speaking mode when they come in contact with Japanese and will shape them into broad-minded people capable of accepting different cultures. We teachers need to create curriculum and lesson plans for Japanese classes that do not simply treat the language as a subject but also provide valuable experiences and lessons that contribute to the process of the learner's growth as a human being.



Comments from the Feedback Committee

Educating for Cross-cultural Understanding

This lesson covers some very interesting themes. Just as each country has its own language, each country also has its own gestures, behavior patterns, body language, and more. I too believe that to learn Japanese, you must not only learn the language itself but also gain this kind of cultural understanding.

I think Ms. Kano has the right idea in incorporating cultural elements beginning from her elementary-level language classes and in allowing students to get used to them gradually. When we do not know much about a country's culture, only the strange aspects of cultural behavior will stand out. If, for instance, a teacher tells students, "Japanese bow when they greet each other," they may simply think, "We don't do that. The Japanese are a funny people." To prevent this from happening, we need to develop lessons so that when we introduce such cultural elements the students will understand them. However, as Ms. Kano says, this is a very difficult theme and cannot be properly explored in just one or two class sessions.

Ms. Kano's focus on aspects of behavior is fascinating. But do be careful about generalizations. For example, opinions differ on whether all Japanese would behave as Ms. Kano explains in Handout #3 on *sayōnara*. Perhaps it would be best to introduce this behavior as what some Japanese do when they say goodbye to one another. In the interest of promoting education for intercultural understanding, a teacher might want to focus on similarities as well as differences. We could, for instance, point out that the meaning of the smile in Japan is sometimes very similar to that in other cultures. This is also a good opportunity to talk about societies other than the United States and Japan. What other nationalities are represented in the class? In the school? What other foreign languages are

taught in the school and what do they do in similar situations? The possibilities for improving cross-cultural communication are enormous.

Language Learning

The last part of this lesson plan touches on direct-style and distal-style. For a 55-minute lesson plan, a lot is being covered. I think it would be better to distill the content a little more, insert more language opportunities, and spread the material over two or more classes. Here are a few starting points:

1. To broaden the range of language learning for bowing, eye contact, nodding and interjectory vocalizations, you could include phrases of apology such as, *Dōmo sumimasen* and *Gomennasai*, and phrases of thanks such as, *Arigatō gozaimasu* and *Dōmo sumimasen*.
2. For interjectory vocalizations and nodding, don't stop at *hai*. Introduce the interjections *ee*, *hunhun*, *hā*, *hē*, and *sō desu ka*. If possible get the students thinking about nodding and interjections by having them listen to Japanese, not English. Once you have taught them how to use these interjections, you can evaluate them in subsequent classes on whether they are able to nod while the teacher is giving an explanation in Japanese.
3. One fun activity would be to do a short Japanese skit in which you bow at the appropriate time and ask students to decide whether the bow was used as (1) a greeting, (2) an apology, or (3) thanks. After the lesson, the teacher can evaluate whether the students can speak Japanese and bow at the same time in the appropriate situation.