



Like, Whatever!

Back in June, there was a very rare occurrence here in Ome - one of my daughters came for a visit! Fumi graduated from university in Vancouver this spring, and decided to come on a trip to Japan, travelling with one of her girlfriends. The two of them were here for two weeks, although they didn't stay with me the entire time, but went off on a couple of 'side trips' to the Kansai and Okinawa as well.

Way back when my two daughters lived together with me, their day-to-day language was Japanese. Although they had both been born over in Canada, we had soon departed for Japan, and once here they went to the local school, blending in completely with the community. During those years, I always spoke to them in English, and our conversations were completely a bilingual mix; English from me to them, Japanese in return. They never actually spoke any English themselves until they moved back to Canada in their early teen years. They then soon picked up the language that they heard in school around them every day, and of course became completely fluent very quickly.

In the intervening years, my own Japanese language ability has slowly improved, and I was curious what language Fumi and I would end up speaking during her visit this year. Perhaps she and I would finally be able to speak some Japanese together! As it turned out, because her friend didn't speak Japanese, the three of us used English for all our conversations. But what an unusual kind of English it turned out to be!

In my own life day to day, I speak English with Sadako, and - because of my basic 'gentle' character - use a fairly polite level of speech. Nothing specifically formal of course, but certainly nothing rough and slangy. For most of my other English contacts - emails with collectors, general correspondence, etc. - I also use a basically polite type of speech, just as I do here on 'A Story A Week'. I don't have any 'drinking buddies' here in Japan, so never have any opportunity to use more casual forms of communication.

My two visitors though, felt no need at all to be 'formal' with their speech; they spoke to each other - and to me - with the same language that they typically use with their friends back in Vancouver. And it was, like, whatever!

"So you know, like, I don't really wanna do that tonight; I'd like, rather, you know ... whatever ..."

I'm not trying to make fun of them by telling you this. The two of them are actually well educated, well behaved, and quite polite, and are completely capable of speaking 'properly' when they deem it necessary. But at home, chatting between themselves, that's the kind of speech they use. And because the mood here was very informal, I was included in such conversations.

It was a very interesting experience for me to have two young people around the house for a couple of weeks, and the three of us had some good fun together. But I found out today that their visit did have some unintended consequences. A reporter from one of the English newspapers in Tokyo had been here for an interview just about that same time, and he and I had a good long - and quite casual - conversation about my work. His story appeared in the paper today, and when I saw some of the quotes attributed to me, I realized that I had indeed been learning things from my daughter while she was here!

"I went to this demonstration and showed one of my prints to the printer. He was like, 'Where did you get this?' I said, I made it myself, and he was like, 'Ha, ha, ha. No, where did you get it?' "

Ouch! How long is it going to take me to live this one down?!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>