

Five things to consider when talking to people from other countries

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Ten Things You Should Not Say to People from Other Countries

By [David Barker](#) | Wednesday May 9th, 2012 | 54

This is a version of an article that was originally published on the [Teacher Talk](#) blog at [azargrammar.com](#). It has been adapted to make the references more appropriate for Japanese learners. Please feel free to copy it if you would like to use with your students. [Click here](#) to download a Japanese translation of the article. If you have any thoughts on the topic, please add a comment.

Many Japanese people feel nervous and excited when they use English to speak to people from other countries. This is natural. People from other countries feel the same way when they try to speak Japanese. Unfortunately, people sometimes say things in a foreign language that they would never say if they were speaking in their own language. This can make them sound rude. There are also some things that would be okay to ask in Japanese that might sound rude if you asked them in English.

Even if what you say is not rude, it may still annoy the other person or make them angry. Remember that a lot of the non-Japanese people in Japan have been here for many years. These people become tired of hearing the same comments and questions over and over again. If you want to communicate effectively in English with people from other countries, it is important to know what you should say to them, but it is just as important to know what you should *not* say. Here is a list of ten things that you should avoid.

1. Where are you from?

There are a couple of problems with this question. The first is that it is in English. Remember that not all people with white or black faces speak English. Even if they do, they may be annoyed if they come from a non-English speaking country. If you want to talk to someone from another country in English, try speaking to them in Japanese first. (If you speak to them in English, they might think that you just want to practice with them.) If they do not understand you when you speak Japanese, your next question should be, "Do you speak English?" Even if you find out that they do, do not ask them questions about America unless you are sure they are from the U.S. This is very annoying for people who come from other countries.

The second problem with this question is that it shows the first thing you are noticing about the person is that they are different from you. It is therefore not a good way to start a conversation. It is much better to talk about the environment you are both in to establish things you have in common. Some examples might be "It's hot today, isn't it?", "This shop is very crowded!", or "Have you been waiting long?" After you have been talking for a while, it is okay to ask, "Where are you from?", but do not try to begin a conversation with this question.

2. "We Japanese..."

Many Japanese people use this expression when they want to say *wareware nihonjin*, but most non-Japanese feel uncomfortable when they hear it. One reason is that it is strange because it sounds as if you are saying that all Japanese people are the same. For example, it is not true to say, "All Japanese eat rice for breakfast!" because many

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1. Where are you from?
2. We Japanese ...
3. 日本語上手ですね！
4. Do you like *natto*?
5. Can you use chopsticks?
6. Your eyes are so blue!
7. Japan is an island country.
8. Are you married?
9. When are you going back to your country?
10. Do you like Japanese sushi?

1. Language

WILLKOMMEN

欢迎

स्वागत

BIENVENIDA

WELCOME

BIENVENUE ようこそ

добро пожаловать

ترحيب

BEM-VINDO



**“I do speak English, but
you shouldn’t presume
that everybody does.”**

But we're speaking Japanese!



<https://youtu.be/oLt5qSm9U80>

2. Topics







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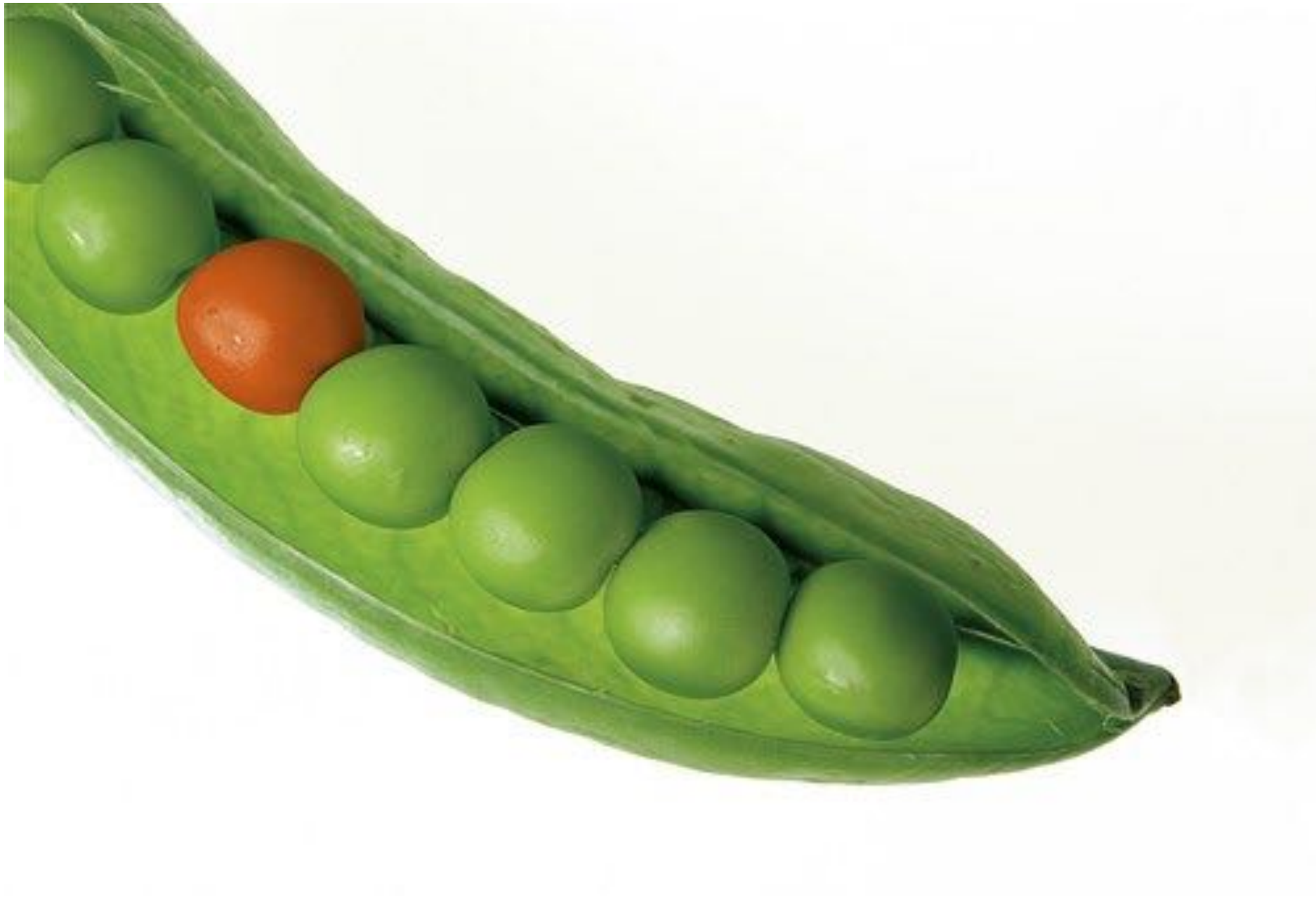


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3. Context



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Gaijin Panic Mode

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日本語上手ですね！

“Japan is an island country!”



4. Manners

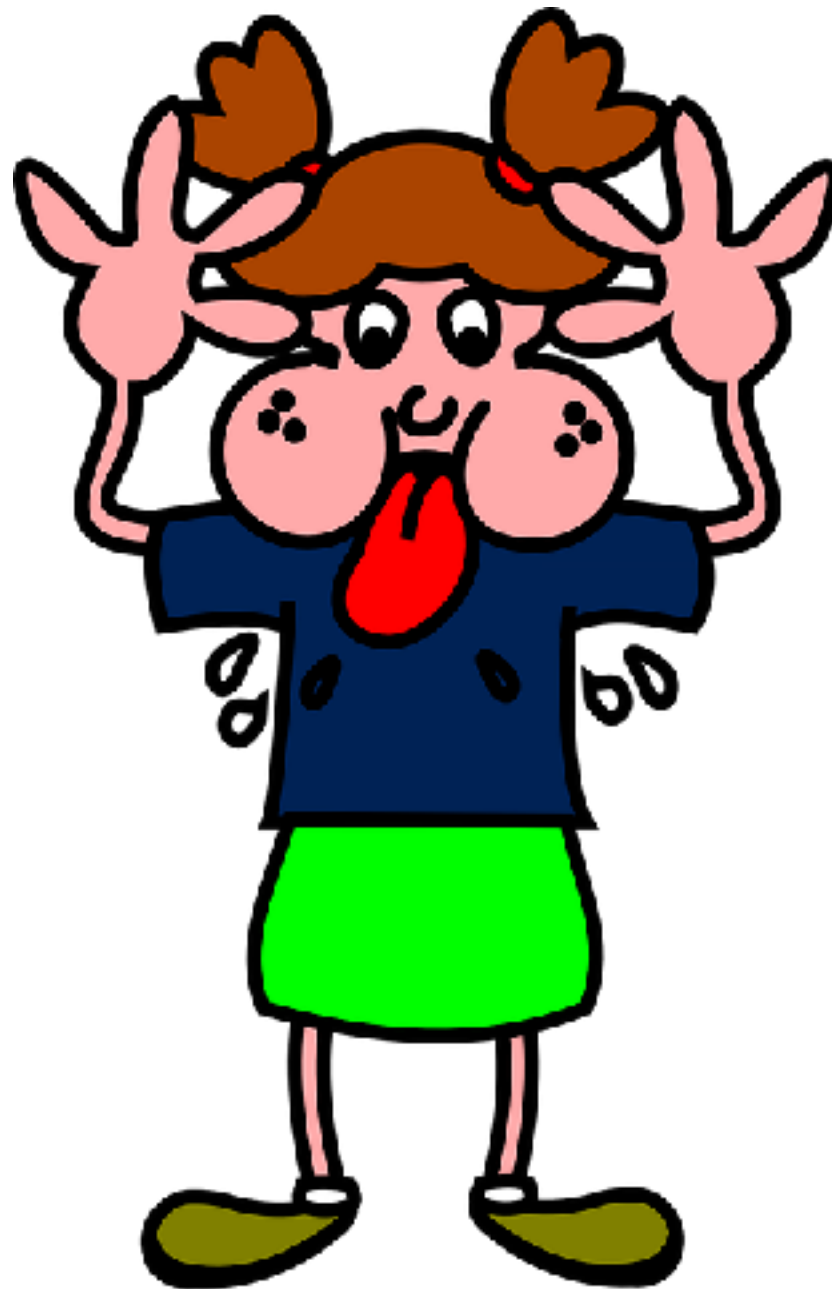


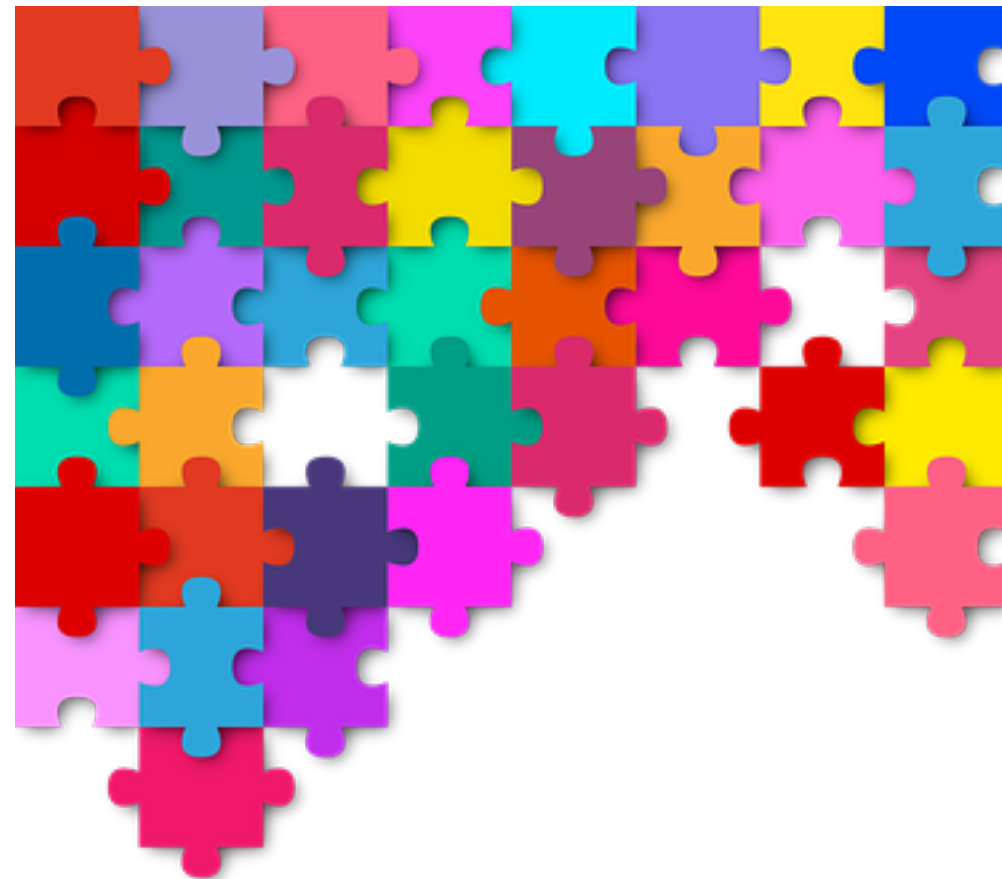
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Swearing

X



5. Common ground



“Do you like *natto*?”

1. Language

2. Topic

3. Context

4. Manners

5. Common ground

Summary



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