

The LLL SIG Newsletter

How JALT has helped me develop my English personality

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The next step in my development came several years ago when I joined JALT. As a volunteer JALT officer, I have learned a lot about how non-Japanese communicate with each other in English through discussion and e-mail.

I was a national vice president of JALT for five years. As I was an only Japanese national director, I had to often communicate with the other six non-Japanese national directors efficiently. What I found out was they tried to be honest with their feelings and thoughts. Some of them even tried to disagree politely with the opinions of others.

They placed great value on words and ideas. They seemed to believe that they could determine the rightness or wrongness of an action by rational reasoning. In the process being exposed to this other set of values, I was able to develop a new style of communication.

I now realize that I need to act in an international way when I communicate with non-Japanese. This international way is sometimes in conflict with how I would feel comfortable acting in a Japanese cultural context. When I need to speak to non-Japanese using English patterns of communication, my way of overcoming Japanese tendencies has been to develop a new personality, a positive English personality in contrast to my negative Japanese one.

We Japanese tend to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action according to what others think of it because of sensitivity to the feelings of others. Through contact with non-Japanese, the long dormant positive personality of my childhood was able to resurface. This open, positive personality asserts itself, for example, when I travel abroad. When I return to Japan, my wife always comments that I seem much happier than I was before I left.

And in fact, under some circumstances, I am even able to carry my English

personality into conversations conducted in Japanese. For example, one of my friends is an American with whom I usually converse in Japanese. Since he is 18 years younger than I am, we would be very unlikely to be able to negotiate as equals if we were both Japanese. In fact, however, even though the language we speak is Japanese, the style of our conversation is very American. We negotiate as equals.