

Dear Colleagues,

Yeah, it was very satisfying to cook last night. Gave me an excellent feeling. Working at the stove I looked out and saw you people in animated conversation. There are few things more fulfilling than hospitality. I guess the Arabs are the greatest and most generous hosts in the world and I admire them their huge, open-armed warmth. When they come here to study they suffer dreadfully from English meanness and the very narrow view of hospitality that is common here.

I also want Bruno to grow up with the idea that one's home should be open and welcoming. I still remember some of my Iranian students from the seventies, from the time of the Shah. Sometimes they took our kitchen over and cooked their national food- the girls cooked and the men sat around and talked! I wonder how many of them are still alive today after the Khomeini revolution and the the terrible war with Iraq that bled them dry for six or more years? These are sad thoughts. let me escape them by reading your letters.

Thank you, T [redacted], for your very amusing letter about the shrieking, Aussie bird your landlady has recently bought from an abandoned birds' home. The letter is clear, fluent and humorous and has a genuine English feel to it. It is firmly subject - verb - object in its thinking. There are no sentences that work in the Japanese Topic-comment way. The vocabulary is rich, varied and excellent. I feel you are discovering a genuine voice for yourself in English both in speaking and on the page. How do you feel about this?

J [redacted], do you think I have given T [redacted] enough details about his language improvement for him to actually believe me? I really hope he realises that in the above paragraph a language technician is speaking to him in honne-mode, not tatemae-mode. When you have read this letter it would be good to explain to the non-Japanese what these two concepts mean. Of course, they are not uniquely Japanese, but maybe your culture is particularly clear about them.

C [redacted], I am delighted that you seem to have had a useful and potentially successful interview with the Christchurch people. Congratulations. I have come to love your crisp self-confidence. You may not always feel like that inside but it's the impression you leave me with.

How did you feel when Thomas asked you to introduce your wife to the group?

T , in Okinawan-Japanese terms, did you somehow feel that I had been a bit cheeky in inviting C j's wife without seeking some form of group consensus? I feel that I behaved in a pretty Western, individualistic, anarchic way. If this was the case for you, I apologise.

S , I reckon you do a pretty good job of assimilating the bits of language you pick up during the day and I don't believe for a moment that you have a brain like a sieve. If you play your cards right, in five months time you will be one of those Japanese whom Westerners really feel at linguistic ease with. You are well on the way.

S , thank you for telling me the story of the ring that you did not buy last week-end but that you dreamt about for three days and then decided to go and buy for yourself. You write: " but now, in my mind, the ring gets more beautiful, nicer and absolutely special - So I must have this ring. " I like people with passion and real wishes. I find them easy to deal with.

Sadly you also write: " So we went to Tenderden by bus, a really long journey, and I bought the ring. It's a nice ring, but not as beautiful as I saw it in my mind."

Guys, I have to get dressed and moped in to Keynes. Forgive me if I have not yet answered your personal letter.

Mario.