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Mind the gap

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I walk into a bookstore, as I look around, and I see a lot of language books. I often wonder why there are so many books for a language learner. This proves that there are many ways to learn language and there isn't one method which suits for everyone. Despite a lot of books available, I believe, there is certain behaviour required for a language learner. 'Do you know what behaviour would help you to learn language?' I wish Google can answer that question, but it wouldn't. I hope my story may enlighten you a little on that.

I'd like to start my speech with my title, 'Mind the gap'. What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase 'Mind the gap'? If you visit Britain before, you would probably know this phrase is used to let passengers know there is a gap between a train and a platform. We should watch out for the gap in language as a language learner. Because of the gap, I experienced a terrible homestay when I was an early 20s. At the beginning of the homestay in the USA, my host father asked me whether I like celery or not and all I did was just nodding even though I had no idea what he asked. Back then, I didn't like celery. The way I see, Japanese are shy to admit that we don't know what other people are talking about. It's a nightmare. That experience told me a lesson, never say YES if I don't know the answer, and be honest about what I don't understand.

The next thing I'm going to present is tricky expressions in English. Why are they tricky? It's because there are similar expressions in Japanese. A first tricky expression is 'to narrow one's eyes'. In English, it means 'to see things suspiciously', while in Japanese, it means 'to see someone with the love and attention'. The second one is 'to pull one's leg'. In English, it means 'to trick someone'; however, in Japanese, it means 'to ruin someone's efforts or to drag someone down'. The last one is 'over my dead body'. In English, it means 'something never happens if I am alive' but in Japanese, it means 'the situation that you must proceed even if you may need to get over my death'. Can you understand them correctly? For me, these

expressions are confusing because, when I hear them, first thing comes to my mind is the meaning of Japanese expressions. The key is to be aware of existence of such expressions and to know the correct meanings of them. By that I mean, it is important to have curiosity for collecting information despite a time-consuming process.

Another point of learning language is that even in one language, there are differences in some respects. As you know, in a few cases, the same word has a different spelling in Britain and the USA. In quite a few cases, the name of things is different between these countries. For example, in Britain, the term UNDERGROUND refers to a subway, or the vegetable name AUBERGINE refers to an eggplant, just to name but a few. While I was studying in Britain, I had classmates from many countries such as Britain, India, China, Nigeria, Ukraine and more. Once we had a funny comparison regarding a milo, M-I-L-O, a chocolate-taste beverage. As same as Japan, some call it [MILO], but the other call it [MAILOU]. We couldn't figure out which one was the correct pronunciation, but it was fun to exchange and share knowledge. The point is that I never know the difference until interacting with others.

To sum up, through my own experience, I've come to realise that there are three basic behaviours for a language learner. 'Be honest'. 'Be curious'. 'Be interactive'. With these behaviour, not only I learn language but I meet great friends, visit amazing places, and, at the end of the day, I have a wonderful life. Finally, I would like to thank you for your kind attention.

Note: This is not a word-for-word transcript.