

of certain questions and answers, or certain compliments and responses. Some typical questions are:

## Nihongo-ga ojoozu-desu-ne

日本語が おしようずですね

(You speak Japanese very well)

Okuni-wa dochira-desu-ka.

(Where are you from?)

Nihon-ryoori-wa taberaremasu-ka.

(Can you eat Japanese food?)

Nihon-wa nagai-desu-ka.

(Have you been in Japan a long time?)

And a typical compliment is

Nihongo-ga ojoozu-desu-ne.

日本語が おしようずですね。

(You speak Japanese very well.)

One thing recently bothering Mr. Ernest Lerner is that Japanese are too ready to praise his Japanese. When he says *Hajimemashite* instead of "How do you do?" to introduce himself, they look surprised; when he says *li otenki-desu-ne* (It's a nice day), they say *Raanaa-san, nihongo-ga ojoozu-desu-ne* (You speak Japanese very well, Mr. Lerner). If someone is complimented on his English for just being able to say "How do you do?" and "It's a nice day," he would feel ridiculed. Being able to say two short sentences or phrases does not mean that one is good at the language.

Mr. Lerner sometimes suspects that Japanese regard foreigners as hopelessly poor at language learning.

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It is easy and comfortable for anyone to talk with those who belong to the same group, but it requires some effort to speak to someone outside the group. This is especially true with people who sharply distinguish those "inside" from those "outside." Therefore most Japanese want to have certain exchanges before they can feel at home with a foreigner. These exchanges consist

These questions and compliments are similar to "How do you do?" in that they are used to confirm that the speaker and the listener are opening communications rather than to gain information.

The Japanese are not always being nosy or flattering; these questions and compliments are very often manifestations of their determination to step outside their own group and approach a foreigner, a step which requires a great deal of courage from most Japanese. The effort underlying this kind of exchange should be properly appreciated. This appreciation will help break up what many foreigners feel as a barrier between themselves and the Japanese.