

Beyond Language

I used to think that language was the only tool to communicate with people. There had been many instances where I witnessed people having trouble communicating with people from different countries. That's why I assumed that it would also be difficult for me to communicate with foreign people if we didn't speak the same language.

My view of communication changed when I was in secondary school. One day, I was given a chance to go to Russia to introduce *wadaiko* (Japanese traditional drums) to the local people. Even though I had given many *wadaiko* performances before, it was the first time that I had performed in a far-away country. I was quite nervous because I had never been to a place where I couldn't understand a single word. Therefore, I was worried that I would have difficulty communicating with people there. The moment I reached Khabarovsk airport, I realized that there wasn't much English used on signboards. I found it very strange to be in an environment filled with odd written characters which didn't make any sense to me. I felt all the more nervous because I had never experienced this feeling before. I was also not sure whether our performance would be appreciated by people from a completely different culture.

Our first performance was at an old folk's home where retired soldiers lived. Before the performance, I couldn't calm myself down because I wasn't confident about our performance. 'Will the audience like our music?' The more I thought about it, the faster my heart beat. Then, my tense feelings melted away when we went on stage. We were welcomed by a warm round of applause. My negative feelings disappeared, and I started to feel more confident. While we were performing, many people in the

audience were clapping and getting into the rhythm. A lot of smiling faces in the audience gave me a good feeling about our performance, and before I knew it, I was enjoying the moment from the bottom of my heart. The performance ended with a big round of applause, and I was happy that the audience enjoyed our performance as much as I did.

After the performance, one of the retired soldiers came to talk to us. He was old but fit and looked a little intimidating. He tried to speak to us but unfortunately, he couldn't speak English so we had to ask an interpreter to help us. The man told us that he fought against Japan during the Russo Japanese war and didn't have a good feeling toward Japan. Hearing this, I became anxious because I had studied about this war and thought that he was angry with us. 'Maybe, he wants to tell us how upset he was because we came from a country he hates, and he wants us to leave immediately.' I felt panicked. Then, suddenly, the serious expression on the ex-soldier's face turned to a gentle smile. He told us that he was moved by the sound that the Japanese drums made, and he said that it is important to preserve and promote this amazing Japanese culture. I was surprised that just the beat of a drum could move a person and make him open his heart to us. I was also happy that music triggered a person to talk to us and accept our culture even though we didn't share a common language.

Before this experience, I always thought that music was just a form of entertainment. Now, I found out that it is a great communication tool, and it can express things that can't be explained by language. Moreover, it can move the audience's heart regardless of their history and culture. When we are suddenly put into a situation where we are surrounded by languages that we are unfamiliar with, it may be quite scary. Even if we can't use language to make ourselves understood

in such a situation, we should try to communicate using a different method. We should never give up just because we don't speak the same language. After all, we have many other ways to communicate with people. My first trip to Russia truly changed my perspective on communication. [696 words]