

## *My Quechua-Speaking Grandmother*

Today I want to share with you a part of my life story. I am a 1.5 generation Peruvian migrant to Japan. 1.5 generation means that I arrived in Japan when I was young, a child, really – my parents were first generation immigrants, so my children would be second generation. I am in between, so, I'm 1.5.

Japan is my second home. I don't feel like a foreigner here, because the time I have lived here is much longer than the time I lived in Peru. But I don't feel Japanese either. Perhaps this is because I am both physically and emotionally different to most Japanese. Although, to be honest, I sometimes feel like a foreigner when I visit Peru. This is because I no longer remember the streets of the city where I lived, and, although I can speak Spanish and have no problem communicating with others, the way I express myself, my gestures, and all my non-verbal communication is now very different to people living in Peru.

Although I sometimes feel like a foreigner in my country of birth, there are still many things that make me feel Peruvian. For example, listening to the traditional music of the Andes, and the Andean folklore. When I listen to *El Cóndor Pasa*, and hear the sound of the *zampoña*, and the *quena*, I feel like I have been transported back to my childhood. Music is not the only thing that makes me still feel Peruvian. One other thing that stands out to me is what I say when I suddenly feel pain or touch something cold. Think about what you say in Japanese – when you touch something unexpectedly hot, do you say “*acchi?*” or, if you, say, knock your knee on a desk, do you say “*ita?*” Well, since I was a little girl – and even now – whenever I touch something surprisingly cold, I instinctively say “*alalau.*” *Alalau* comes from the Quechuan language, and might be similar to how you might say “*tsumetai.*” Another one is “*achacau,*” which I might say when I knocked my knee on a desk. I also say “*achachai*” when I have made a mistake, or something is a serious problem.

Anyway, all of these expressions come from the Quechua language. In my home country of Peru, the official languages – there are several – include Spanish, which is used by more than 80% of the population, then Quechua, around 14%, Aymara, just under 2%, and many other native languages. Quechua is a language spoken along the Andes Mountain range, from southern Colombia to northeastern Argentina. There are several varieties of Quechua – just like there is British and American English, and more, and there are many dialects in Japan – not many people in Tokyo would say, “*shirangana,*” right? But it's still Japanese! It's the same for Quechua. In Peru, Quechua is considered an important language, but many of its varieties are endangered.

Even though I am Peruvian, I can't speak Quechua. My mother doesn't speak it either. But both of my grandmothers did. My paternal grandmother was from the province of Pomabamba, which is called *Pumapampa* in Quechua – *puma* means the large cat, and *pampa* means ‘plain,’ like *heiya* in Japanese. My grandmother moved to the capital city of Lima when she was very young. In Lima, Spanish is officially spoken. My grandmother moved there looking for a better life, but she had many struggles, and faced a lot of discrimination for not speaking Spanish correctly.

My grandmother, because she was the oldest sister, could not go to school. When her mother died, she had the responsibility to take care of her younger siblings, so she never had the opportunity to learn how to read or write. When she arrived in Lima, she met my grandfather, who was also from a region of the Andes. They built a life together in the city.

My grandmother and grandfather opened a bakery, and built a large house where they welcomed people from the Andes, and gave them work. Many people who arrived in Lima found our house to be a place of support and guidance. Many of them spoke Quechua. Although I cannot speak the language, I remember when I was a child, listening to my grandmother speaking Quechua with her friends from the same village. Even when her friends got settled, they would still often visit my grandmother – in this way, she really was a *grand* mother, providing support to many others. Even now, more than 20 years after her death, there are many people who remember her and are very grateful to her.

Quechua for me is not only a language of my homeland, it is the language that links me to my

grandmother. Although I only spoke to her in Spanish, I can still hear her speaking Quechua. In my own experience, I came to Japan when I was 15 years old, to a new country and a new language. I feel as though I lived a similar process to my grandmother. But I have to be grateful – in my second home of Japan, there are more opportunities for women to study.

My grandmother couldn't go to school, and she was illiterate, but a great person. More than 90 years after her birth, her grandchild is now teaching at a university in Japan. I hope she is proud of me.

### Questions, Answers and Hints:

**1. Does the narrator have children?**

**Answer:** Probably not.

**Hints/Clues:** When discussing her status as a 1.5 generation immigrant, the narrator says, “my children *would be* second generation” – this use of subjunctive mood suggest that she does not have children – otherwise she would have likely used the expression “my children *are*.”

**2. Why do you think the narrator's ‘non-verbal’ communication is different to people in Peru?**

**Answer:** Answers will vary.

**Hints/Clues:** No specific clues are given in the text, excepting the narrator's upbringing as described. Rather, by this point in the course, it is hoped that students will be able to offer their own hypotheses – hopefully grounded in a developing understanding that non-verbal modes of communication are also culturally informed.

**3. What is *El Cóndor Pasa*? Can you think of a Japanese equivalent?**

**Answer:** A song, or a musical piece. (Japanese equivalents will vary).

**Hints/Clues:** “When I listen to *El Cóndor Pasa*, and hear the sound of the *zampoña*, and the *quena*, I feel like I have been transported back to my childhood. Music is not the only...” When speaking of *El Cóndor Pasa*, the narrator clearly addresses musical instruments, and thus, is suggestive of a traditional musical piece. As for Japanese equivalents, local variations of festival music might appear – such as *hanagasa ondō*.

**4. How would you translate “*achachai*”?**

**Answer:** Answers will vary, but something like ‘しまった、こまった’ would suffice.

**Hints/Clues:** The narrator says, “I also say “*achachai*” when I have made a mistake, or something is a serious problem.” This has been preempted by discussions of “*acchi*” – an instinctive reaction to something hot, or “*ita*” – something surprisingly painful. From context, students should be able to give reasons for their hypotheses about “*achahai*.”

**5. Why do you think the region name, Pomabamba, is different from the original Quechua name of *Pumapampa*?**

**Answer:** Answers will again vary, but this is a representation of the original name in Spanish.

**Hints/Clues:** No specific clues given – however, by this point it is hoped that students will have some notion of different language nomenclatures. If not, the naming of ‘Japan,’ can provide a useful hint for discussion – where did this name come from?

**6. The narrator says of her grandmother ‘she really was a *grand* mother.’ This is a pun in English, on grand-mother and ‘grand mother.’ Why is this a pun?**

**Answer:** Specific answers will vary, but the pun is on the narrator's (actual) grandmother being a ‘grand’ (i.e., magnificent, important etc.) ‘mother,’ to other immigrants to Lima.

**Hints/Clues:** This does not rely on the text itself, but rather an understanding of the English language terms 'grandmother,' 'grand,' and 'mother.'