

What a Difference Professor Beebe Makes

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I first met Professor Beebe while attending the Teachers College, Columbia University, Tokyo Program. I was pursuing an MA in TESOL while teaching English full-time at a Japanese secondary school. One day, I overheard classmates gossiping about a professor from New York who was scheduled to teach the following semester. One student who claimed to have friends in the New York program warned that she was “extremely tough,” “super-strict,” and “slaughters you if you are not good enough.” I visualized this fearsome lady as an old scholar with thick glasses and penetrating eyes. Needless to say, we were positively frightened.

On the first day of her class, we waited in silence until she came striding in, full of energy and with an elegant smile on her face. The difference from what I had imagined was so vast that I felt stunned. Professor Beebe’s course turned out to be tough indeed, yet so inspiring that by the end of the semester I played with the idea of continuing my studies in New York.

Professor Beebe’s courses at the Tokyo Program have changed my life. They opened a window into the fields of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, and thanks to Professor Beebe’s encouragement and guidance, I even began to consider a doctoral degree. Throughout my graduate studies, both in Tokyo and in New York, she continued to inspire and inform my work. Her courses at Teachers College in New York deepened my interest in politeness, face, and discourse, which became the theme of my dissertation and my recent book.

Professor Beebe’s research and her work with her students, as well as her diverse interests (photography, bird watching, etc.) are keeping her fresh forever. I consider myself lucky to count her as my teacher, friend, and role model, for it is my hope that I can be as inspiring and helpful to my students as she has been to me.

Naomi Geyer is an Associate Professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her recent book, *Discourse and Politeness: Ambivalent Face in Japanese* (Continuum), explores face negotiations in collaborative disagreements, teasing, and troubles talk.