After the first week or two had passed during my homestay at Kansai Gaidai, I started to hear the word アホ quite frequently at home. I was shocked to hear my host mom call her kids アホ on a daily basis. I found this shocking because before coming to Kansai Gaidai, I had always learned in Japanese class that calling someone アホ was pretty much like calling someone a retard in English – a pretty strong negative connotation to say the least. Was my host mom so cruel as to constantly be calling her kids retards???

Fortunately, the answer to this question came in my Japanese speaking class one day not too far into the semester. We had a chapter on Kansai-ben, and Shiomi Sensei explained to us that in the Kansai region, the word アホ does not carry the same severity as it does in the rest of Japan. While アホ is not in itself a Kansai-ben word, its usage is much different in the Kansai region. It is like calling someone a fool or idiot, but doesn’t necessarily carry an explicitly strong negative connotation. Furthermore, in the Kansai region, the word ばか carries a rather strong connotation, whereas in the Tokyo region and much of the rest of Japan ばか is used rather lightly. Calling someone a ばか in the Kansai region is like calling someone an アホ in the Tokyo region – it can be very insulting and is taken seriously. Essentially, the usage of アホ and ばか in the Kansai region is reversed - アホ is used without much concern whereas ばか is very stern and negative. So be careful when throwing around insults at Kansai Gaidai - don’t confuse the アホ’s with the ばか’s!

Below are two charts summarizing the usages of アホ and ばか – one for the Kansai region and one for the Kanto region:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>関西地方</th>
<th>関東地方</th>
<th>Nuance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>アホ</td>
<td>Fool; Idiot</td>
<td>Moron; Imbecile</td>
<td>Lightly criticizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ばか</td>
<td>Moron; Imbecile</td>
<td>Fool; Idiot</td>
<td>Strongly negative, insulting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s look at a few scenarios where my host mom would call her kids アホ:

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1 The Kanto Region (関東地方) is the large middle-eastern region of Honshu, which includes the Tokyo metropolitan area and the prefectures of Chiba, Saitama, Kanagawa, Ibaraki, Gunma, and Tochigi
Situation 1: The kids start rough housing and Yamato hurts Kaito, who in turn starts crying which catches Kazuya’s attention:

カズヤ: どうしたん？！？
カイト: ヤマトにしやかれた²！
カズヤ: なんでやねん！「ごめん」って言いなさいよ！
ヤマト: ごめん。
カズヤ: アホちゃう？
Kazuya: What happened???
Kaito: Yamato hit me!
Kazuya: What the heck! Say you’re sorry!
Yamato: Sorry…
Kazuya: Are you guys idiots?

Also, the situations I presented in Chapter 6 about あかん could both have アホ in them. For example: Situation 2: During dinner, Kaito, the 8-year-old son, finds the Gyoza hard to eat with his chopsticks, so he reverts to eating with his hands, which Kazuya immediately reprimands him for:

カズヤ: 何してんの³？
カイト: 食べにくい、この餃子。。。 
カズヤ: それ、あかんよ。アホ。ちゃんと箸使いなさい。
Kazuya: What are you doing?
Kaito: These gyoza are hard to eat…
Kazuya: Don’t do that [eat with your hands]. Fool. Use your chopsticks properly.

² Here we encounter the Kansai-ben word しやく (“to strike”; “to hit”) in its passive form (“victim” は “villain” に“evil act”)
³ 何してんの is one of the Kansai-ben versions of standard Japanese’s “何しているの？” a very common greeting asking “What’s up?” or “What are you doing?”
Let’s look at one more situation with Tsunemi and Kyohei where you could use アホ:

ツネミ：今日プレゼンの結果が分かったで。

キョウヘイ：あ、まじで？どうやったん？

ツネミ：あんまよくなかった。多分徹夜したから眠過ぎた。

キョウヘイ：やっぱり徹夜しなかったらよかったやろ。ほんまにアホやな。

ツネミ：ほんま、それわね。ほん今度プレゼンがある時、徹夜しないわ。

Tsunemi: I found out the results of my presentation today.

Kyohei: For real? How was it?

Tsunemi: Not too great. I was probably too exhausted because I stayed up all night the night before.

Kyohei: See you would have been better off in the end if you hadn’t stayed up all night, right? You really are an idiot...

Tsunemi: That is true, really... I guess next time I have a presentation I won’t stay up all night.

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4 In second-year Japanese, you learn in *Genki* Chapter 18 that you can describe an alternative course of action that should have been taken, or regrettably was not taken, with the conditional verb form 〜ば〜かった. In Kansai the 〜たら conditional form is often favored over the 〜ば conditional form, so in this sentence we see the verb 徹夜する (“to stay up all night”) in its negative, 〜たら form with よかった (lit. “It would have been good if you had not stayed up all night.”)