

# The LLL SIG Newsletter

## Rakugo and its Application to English Education

*Tatsuya Sudo*

*Lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies*

*and teacher of English Rakugo*

Rakugo is a sit-down comedy which usually ends with a punch line that provokes laughs. Japanese jokes are often based on a play on words; they are missed in the process of translation but the story itself is quite understandable in English.

To get the story across more easily to a foreign audience, we can change the names of characters and ideas in the story. For example, when I perform Rakugo, I sometimes change the names of typical characters like Hachigoro and Kumagoro to English names such as John and Henry. I may also change Japanese food to Western food. By changing manju to hamburgers, for example, in the story 'Manju Kowai' or 'Scary Manju', foreign people can easily imagine what is happening. However, to what extent we should adapt to the western culture is still debatable.

In Rakugo, only conversations between characters appear in the story. Therefore, the performer must be able to play the role of each distinct character, and there are always several characters in a Rakugo story. Performers distinguish between characters by changing their voice, facial expressions, mannerisms and speech.

Since Rakugo is a story based on conversation, it is suitable tool to help people acquire spoken English. You need to recite the story hundreds of times before you present it to the audience. This

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process of reading aloud is crucial to develop the skill of spoken English

Since Rakugo is a solo performance, you do not need a conversation partner. It is true that the number of foreign people is increasing in Japan, yet it is still hard to find a partner to talk to in English as long as you live and work in Japan. In Rakugo, you talk to imaginary characters such as your friends, your parents, and siblings, so you can practice conversation by yourself and you can create your own story.

Using this 'Rakugo method', I believe the Japanese can improve the ability of spoken English and simultaneously acquire a sense of humor.