

# The LLL SIG Newsletter

## Will memory decline? Rakugo for older learners

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As a great fan of rakugo, one of the traditional spoken arts in Japan, I started a rakugo class in 1991, and I kicked off its English version in 2007. Rakugo is a story based on conversation and performed by one person who plays various characters. Its roots can be traced back about 300 years.

The students of the English rakugo class are from all walks of life: businessmen, government officials, teachers, self-employed merchants, TV reporters, tourist guides, etc. We also have a variety of students in terms of age with class members ranging from junior high school students to senior citizens. Eight of the seniors are in their 60s and three in their 70s.

One of the things which stuck me most about the older members of the class is that all of these retirees still have a great memory. An average rakugo performance is about 15 minutes long and they have no problem memorizing the story. We have two recitals a year, so they present a 15-minute story twice a year in the presence of a large audience. Once there was a woman who started rakugo when she was 70 and left the class when she was 80. She quit the class not because she could no longer memorize the story but because she suffered from a serious backache which prevented her from traveling a long distance.

***Looking at all those people, I firmly believe that memory will not decline so easily or quickly. If you have a will and keep using your head, you can maintain your memory. And you can even make other people laugh!***