

Japanese humor in English is well funny

申田外語大学、駒澤大学で講師を務め、英語落語家・鹿鳴家英楽として舌躍する須藤達也さん(奇しくも小紙人気コラムの登場人物と同じご本名)。英語落語を20年近く紹介し続け、大学の授業や英語教員研修でも教える英楽さんに、rakugoの魅力やこ自身の「英語歴」について伺った。

鹿鳴家英楽(かなりや えいらく) 本名、須藤達也。愛知県出身。1981年上智大学外国語学部卒業。1994年、テンプル大学大学院卒業、教育学修士。立談志に強い影響を受け、1983年に談が落語立川流を創設した直後に、立流に参加。同時期桂枝雀の活動に触れて英語落語を始める。「キャナリ英語落語教室」主宰。神田外語大学、澤大学講師。

Just as you don't have to be an American to **appreciate** the jokes of a stand-up comedian in New York, you don't have to understand Japanese to appreciate rakugo — especially when it's told in English. English rakugo master Kanariya Eiraku (real name Tatsuya Sudo) proves the point. Eiraku has built his career on translating traditional rakugo stories into English and telling them on stage.

“A lot of people ask me whether a foreign **audience** is able to **get** rakugo at all. The answer is yes. They're very **attentive** and eager to understand, and compared to a Japanese audience, perhaps they're able to **absorb facets** of humor that would **elude** native Japanese.”

Eiraku says foreign audiences are especially **partial to Jugemu**, the story about one thing only — the impossibly long name that a **doting** father gives to his baby son. As the baby grows into a man, his name causes him all kinds of trouble, mainly because it takes so long for anyone to call or refer to him.

“Jugemu really travels well. I guess it's because the concept of a long and strange name is familiar to people everywhere.”

Astonishingly, Eiraku has never studied abroad.

“But I had always been interested in the language,” he says. “I started learning a year before everyone

else, in the sixth grade, when I asked my parents to let me attend an English school in my neighborhood. But when I got to junior high school, I was disappointed. In my day, we all had to start with ‘This is a pen.’ I mean, what is that? No English-speaking person would ever say such a thing. It just felt wrong.”

In hindsight, though, there were some aspects of his junior high English classes that Eiraku could appreciate.

“The Japanese education system **puts great store on** English grammar and I do have to say that grammar is necessary. Most Japanese start studying English in their early teens. By that age, English feels more foreign (than it would if children were exposed to it earlier), so it must be studied methodically. It's certainly not going to come to us naturally.”

Eiraku **supplemented** his school studies with English lesson programs on NHK Radio and TV, and though these were very instructional, Eiraku holds that ondoku — reading out loud — will take the English learner to places they never thought possible.

“The key thing is to listen to really good English, and then imitate it, **inflection** by inflection. Before long, the sentences become your own.” (Kaori Shoji)



COURTESY OF KANARIYA EIRAKU

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「オペラ並みのスケール、ギリシャ悲劇のような哀しさ、シェークスピアの機知、ミュージカルのもたらすあふれんばかりの喜び、これらがさったロックアルバム」。クイーンのフレディ・マーキュリーが目音楽を聞かれた時の答えです。落語もこのように語れたら最高です。

appreciate ～を理解する、楽しむ。audience 観客。get ～を分かる。attentive 話をよく聞く。absorb ～を吸収する。facets 側面。elude ～は理解できない。(are) partial to ～～が好きだ。doting 子煩悩な。Astonishingly 驚くことに。In hindsight 後から思えば。puts ... on ～～を重視する。supplemented ～を補足した。inflection 抑揚。