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Rakugo : a discourse analysis of Japanese traditional comic storytelling

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１．論文内容の要旨

Rakugo is a unique Japanese storytelling art with a history of over 300 years. Today there are over 600 storytellers performing in two main traditions, the Tokyo or Edo tradition, and the Osaka or Kamigata tradition. Many valuable studies have been written on Rakugo from a linguistics point of view. However, these studies have concentrated on analyzing Rakugo as text, much as one might the script of a play.

To my knowledge, there have not yet been any studies conducted on Rakugo as it unfolds in performance. To some extent, this is understandable. Rakugo is an oral tradition, with stories passed down from master to disciple for generations and generations. Although there is a canon of stories, no two storytellers perform the same story in quite the same way, and differences between members of different Rakugo "families" can be extreme. Furthermore, Rakugo consists of an introductory part called the *makura* or "pillow," where the storyteller introduces himself and in a sense "warms up" the audience with his own material - anything from jokes and stories about what's in the news to pop culture to even his own family life. So you have a storytelling art where every performance is different - even two performances of the same story by the same performer are bound to be different. How does one conduct a scientific study on such an unstable performance art?

On the other hand, even if it does not lend itself to an exact linguistic science, I have found that there are linguistic events, points of interest, trends, or motifs, as it were, that make the performance of Rakugo fascinating and worth of treatment in a discourse analysis, and that is what I am attempting here. I believe I have uncovered some gems, and I hope that this paper represents a first step down a path others will choose to take as well.

The underlying thrust of this paper is that Rakugo is an art that has very strict limitations or restrictions. It is performed by a lone storyteller who kneels on a cushion and does not leave the cushion until the end of his performance. His costume consists of a (usually) simple kimono. There are no lighting effects, and the lights over the audience are usually left on enough so that the storyteller can see his audience clearly. The storyteller uses only a Japanese fan and hand towel for props, to represent various objects his characters might use. The plot is driven by ordinary conversations between two or more characters who are differentiated by the storyteller by shifting his head and sightline from left to right.

Yet despite these limitations, and indeed very much thanks to these limitations, you have a storytelling art that is as limited in its possibilities only as is the imagination of the audience and the skill of the storyteller.

And, most importantly, the Rakugo storyteller has a uniquely intimate relationship to his audience. The audience is everything to the storyteller. The *makura* section of the performance

is entirely devoted to appealing to the audiences good will and sympathies, making them comfortable, getting to know their makeup, age, taste in humour, and otherwise establishing a good relationship between storyteller and listener.

These essential facets of Rakugo, that it is a storytelling art with severe restrictions, that these restrictions allow a kind of focus that opens up unique storytelling possibilities that are not available in film or theatre or other storytelling forms, and that the Rakugo story teller has a uniquely intimate relationship with his audience which influences what he says and how he performs, these facets of Rakugo are actually manifested linguistically in many ways in the Rakugo storytellers performance.

In this paper, I explore the discourse of Rakugo as it occurs in performance. First, I investigate the storytelling modes that the storyteller uses at various times in his performance. In the *makura*, which is conducted almost as a conversation with the audience, the storyteller can be said to be in "dialogic mode." In this mode, he addresses the audience directly, even asks direct questions, refers to himself in the first person, and his use of language is conversational.

In the second part of the Rakugo performance, the storyteller enters his main story or *hanashi*. It is here that the proverbial "fourth wall" goes up, a dramatic illusion is created, the storyteller leads his audience into a fictional reality, and even the sparsely used narrator, who sounds somewhat like the storyteller himself back in dialogic mode, actually uses a language style quite dramatically removed from that of the *makura*. I have called this the "narrative mode." The need for these modes stems directly from the limitations of the storyteller performing alone, and reflect his changing relationship with the audience as the story continues.

In the following section, I explore the idea of various "personae" that the storyteller takes on through the course of his performance - that of himself, those of his characters and that of his narrator. Of particular interest in this section is the effect of the persona of "himself" occasionally intruding upon the main story or *hanashi*, in a sense briefly breaking the fourth wall, destroying for a moment the dramatic illusion, bringing his audience back to the present here and now reality, before continuing with his story as if nothing had happened. The linguistic aspects of these intentional "aberrations" are of particular interest.

In the following three chapters I discuss some very unique features of Rakugo storytelling. The first is what I have called "monologic dialogue." This occurs when two characters are conversing, but you only hear one of them speaking, much in the same way you might hear half of a telephone conversation. This technique comes up in Rakugo on occasion, and serves several distinct purposes; to save time by avoiding repetition of information already known to the audience, to put the emphasis on one character's reactions, to skip past through section of dialogue more

quickly and efficiently, to save the storyteller from having to create unnecessary characters which would burden the story and confuse the audience. The emergence of this kind of scene in Rakugo is accompanied with its own unique and fascinating linguistic patterns.

In the next chapter I investigate scene changes in Rakugo. The Rakugo storyteller has the ability to change scene's in an instant, or to prolong the process of changing scenes as fits the needs of the story. But without lighting, costumes, background music, curtains or other tools used to change scenes in the theatrical arts, how does the storyteller accomplish this? In fact, what advantages does the restricted lone storyteller have with all his limitations over the theatrical or filmic arts encumbered by all their technical advantages and superiority of manpower?

Finally, I explore quotations-within-quotations. This occurs when on character is reporting a previous conversation or event. To varying degrees, the reported event gradually becomes the new fictional reality, much like a flashback in a film or novel, before returning to the present fictional reality. I explore how fictional reality is particularly fluid in Rakugo storytelling, as the storyteller can move almost seamlessly between reported conversations and present conversations and their respective temporal and geographic contexts.

In the final chapter, I argue that all of these features of Rakugo are born of Rakugo's limitations, are used to help the storyteller tell his story with minimalism, clarity and humour as his ideals, and with the interest and presence of the audience always at the forefront of anything the Rakugo storyteller says or does from his opening bow to the final "falling word" or punch line of his story.

To be sure, none of these discoveries would have been possible by studying Rakugo a text alone. I have used as my sources videos, DVDs, television recordings and other recordings of live performances of Rakugo. Also essential to the ideas formed in this paper are the ten years I have spent working on projects with Rakugo storytellers, and listening to their ideas about Rakugo, as well as observing their performances live. Of particularly invaluable experience was the honour I had to be hired by the Yoshimoto Creative Agency to create the English subtitles for a new Rakugo DVD series that included all twenty performances by the great Rakugo master Katsura Bunchin, recorded over ten days at the National Theatre in Tokyo in April of 2010. The act of translating over 12 hours of Rakugo and watching Master Bunchin's performances over and over again, as well as having had the chance to talk with him about Rakugo on several occasions, provided me with tremendous insight into what a storyteller does when he performs a story.

Again, I believe with this paper I have uncovered some diamonds in the rough, and it is my hope that others may be inspired to take up this investigation and eventually, through scholarly dialogue on the linguistics of Rakugo in performance, give this unique and precious Japanese storytelling art the attention and recognition it very much deserves and is long overdue.