

ORAL READING CONTESTS OF LITERARY WORKS AS EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION.

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Abstract. This paper is a practical report on incorporating the reading aloud of literary works as an extracurricular activity in Japanese language learning. In the age of AI, this study revisits the significance and challenges of traditional learning activities by exploring the value of reading aloud—an approach that may be seen as classical. While there have been increasingly critical views toward oral reading of textbook passages in recent years, reading aloud as a creative activity differs in nature from simple oral reading. Furthermore, by organizing the reading aloud activity in the form of a contest, it proved to be a meaningful endeavor in terms of enhancing learners' motivation, sense of achievement, and overall satisfaction with university life.

Key words: oral reading, contests, literary works, master of literature, extracurricular activities, university life.

The field of Japanese language education is now facing not only a diversification of learners, but also a diversification of learning methods. At the forefront of this trend is the emergence of online learning platforms based on a digital society, accompanied by the growing influence of AI as a learning tool. Language educators are constantly navigating the benefits and challenges presented by these new learning environments as they engage in day-to-day teaching.

This study explores the significance and challenges of incorporating the activity of reading literary works aloud into language education. As AI translation tools continue to advance, we must reconsider what kinds of practical language competencies we should expect from students, and what types of training are necessary in the learning process. Reading aloud and memorization are widely recognized and practiced learning methods in East Asia, but as Watanabe (2024) notes, such methods are often perceived as repetitive and monotonous [1]. From the CEFR's perspective—which emphasizes positioning learners as social beings—reading from a textbook may not align well with an action-oriented approach. It has also been viewed critically from the perspective of the communicative approach [2]. However, the act of reading aloud can be reinterpreted as a form of "creative and artistic language use" that holds intrinsic value, and as "aesthetic language use" [1]. Hanasaka (2015) also asserts that reading aloud should not be merely about voicing the text, but about understanding its meaning deeply and sharing that understanding with others in

a collaborative act [3]. Unlike simple oral reading, I focus on the creative, artistic, and aesthetic aspects of the activity referred to here as *rōdoku* (expressive oral reading). This focus is closely tied to the question of what forms of language activity will remain uniquely human as AI continues to demonstrate increasingly advanced information-processing capabilities. Coincidentally, many students have expressed dissatisfaction with their current campus life, which often consists of simply attending classes and commuting between home and the university—partly due to the growing number of students. By allowing students to experience the highest forms of expression in the target language—what literary writing sounds like when read aloud, and how that differs from typical textbook sentences—the goal was to foster greater motivation for learning, deepen their interest, and enrich their student life. With this in mind, we organized an oral reading contest. Reports suggest that reading activities and contests are meaningful in Uzbekistan as well [4]. In our department, students from the second to the fourth year dedicate a substantial amount of time to the study of Japanese literature. This also aligns with our aim of incorporating literature education through expressive reading [5].

The year 2025 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of literary master Yukio Mishima. To commemorate this occasion, we chose to make it one of the reasons for organizing an oral reading contest. Yukio Mishima is considered one of Japan's greatest postwar literary figures and continues to be highly acclaimed both domestically and internationally. Initially, we considered selecting several of Mishima's works for the contest. However, given the students' proficiency levels, we ultimately selected only his representative novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (*Kinkakuji*). This decision was also in line with the contest's aim of encouraging participation from a wide range of students. In addition to Mishima, we selected one work each from three other celebrated authors—Natsume Sōseki, Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, and Osamu Dazai—bringing the total to four literary works. For each, we designated an excerpt lasting approximately 4 to 5 minutes when read aloud as the reading task for the contest.

Objectives:

1. To take advantage of the anniversary of a literary figure as an opportunity for students to engage more closely with Japanese literature, their field of specialization.
2. To provide students with opportunities to use Japanese outside the classroom.
3. To encourage students to improve their Japanese skills and gain valuable experience by taking on the challenge of the contest.

Current Situation and Challenges

With the increasing number of students, both faculty and students are often limited to only classroom activities, leading to unfulfilling routines of commuting between home and campus. The existing annual speech contest reaches only a small fraction of students, and the high barrier of composing a speech from

scratch means that participation is not easily accessible to all. Through this reading contest, we hoped to offer students a chance to showcase the Japanese they have been learning, while also deepening their understanding of Japanese literature, their academic focus.

Target Participants

This year, we limited participation to students enrolled in the Japanese language department of our university. We announced the contest by posting notices in the hallways and launching a dedicated website that provided updated information about the event.

Special Website

The website was structured as follows:


- Home: Introduced the purpose of the contest and provided details about the assigned literary works. Full texts of the selected excerpts were made available as downloadable PDFs, and audio recordings were also uploaded. These recordings were created by a professional reader, commissioned specifically so that students could use them as models for practice.


2025-yil Mishima Yukio tavalludining 100 yilligi bo'ladi.

Shu bois, biz sizga yapon yozuvchilari haqida chuqurroq tushuncha berish va har kuni o'rganayotgan yapon tilini namoyish etish imkonini berish maqsadida O'zbekistonda ilk bor kitobxonlik tanlovini o'tkazmoqdamiz.

BU TANLOV KIMLAR UCHUN ?

 *Yapon adabiyotiga qiziquvchilar*

 *Yapon tilida dadil gapirishni xohlovchilar*

 *Payshanba kungi bo'sh vaqtini maroqli o'tkazmoqchi bo'lganlar uchun Yuqorida ko'rsatilgan Mishima Yukio va boshqa Yapon yozuvchilarining asarlaridan birini tanlab, ifodali o'qishni mashq qiling va chiroyli o'qish qobiliyatingizni namoyon qiling.*

- Yukio Mishima: A dedicated page introduced Yukio Mishima and his representative work, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of his birth, which also served as the theme of this year's contest.

- Schedule: Participants were listed according to the literary work they had chosen to read, and the contest schedule, including the time slots for each performance, was published on this page.

- Judging: To help students better prepare, the evaluation criteria were made public in advance.

1. Tushuntirish qobiliyati [mazmun tinglovchilarga yaxshi yetkazilganmi]

2. Til darajasi [so'zlarning talaffuzi to'g'ri va aniq bo'ldimi]

3. Ijro etish mahorati [shaxsiyat va ijodiy yondashuv bo'lganmi]

However, instead of relative evaluation (ranking participants from highest to lowest score), an absolute evaluation system was adopted. In this system, participants who achieved over 80% of the total score were awarded the “Excellence Award,” while those who scored over 70% received an “Effort Award.”

Additionally, an explanation of what “oral reading” entails was provided as

O'qish (ろうどく) - bu matnni ovoz chiqarib o'qish harakatidir. Ayniqsa, h is-tuyg'ular va sahnalarni ifoda etgan holda tinglovchilarga yetkazishga katta e'tibor beriladi. O'qish, adabiy asarlar, she'rlar, hikoyalar va boshqa turli xil matnlarni ovoz orqali ifoda etuvchi san'at turidir.

O'qishning maqsadi shunchaki harflarni o'qish emas, balki matn mazmuni va hissiyotlarini tinglovchilarga yetkazishdir. Shu sababli, o'quvchi ovoz ohangi, tezligi, pauzalari kabi jihatlarga e'tibor qaratib, asar dunyosini va qahramonlar hissiyotlarini samarali tarzda ifoda etadi.

O'qish ta'lim muassasalarida, madaniy tadbirlarda, radioda, audio kitoblarda va boshqa turli xil joylarda qo'llaniladi. Bundan tashqari, o'qish orqali tinglovchilar asarni chuqurroq tushunishlari va hayajonni baham ko'rishlari kutiladi.

O'qish tarixi qadimiy bo'lib, qadim zamonlardan buyon hikoyalar va she'rlarni og'zaki ravishda yetkazish vositasi sifatida ishlatilgan. Hozirgi kunda ham o'qish adabiyot va san'atning bir qismi sifatida ko'pchilik tomonidan seviladi.

follows:

In addition to providing information about the venue, the website was updated after the event to include the contest results and a list of award recipients.

More than 30 students, from first to fourth year and across both day and night classes, signed up for the contest. Of those, 23 students gave oral readings on the day of the event. Since the contest was held on a weekday, it had to be divided into morning and afternoon sessions to avoid conflicts with students' class schedules. However, both from the perspective of organizers and participants, it would have been preferable to hold the event as a single, unified session.

There is no doubt that the students who performed gained valuable experience and inspiration. However, the following issues became apparent.

Communication

As mentioned earlier, event announcements were made via bulletin boards, the website, and multiple messages sent through Telegram. Nevertheless, many students reported not noticing the notifications, indicating that the information did not effectively reach all intended recipients. This highlights a broader issue—the need to establish more reliable channels of communication between faculty and students.

Target Participants

One of the main goals of the event was to encourage participation from students who are usually hesitant to take part in such activities. Unlike national or Central Asian speech contests, which often require the creation of original manuscripts and involve intense competition, this internal event aimed to lower the barrier to entry and be more accessible, especially to students who may not typically stand out in regular classes. However, the actual participants were primarily those who consistently perform well academically, suggesting that less confident students still hesitated to join. Moving forward, one of the key challenges is to design a format that makes participation feel achievable regardless of academic standing.

Instruction and Evaluation

While some of the judges were invited from outside the department, others were Japanese language instructors within the faculty. This dual role—providing instruction and evaluating performances—raised concerns among some participants. It may be necessary to establish clearer distinctions between instructors and judges in future events.

Evaluation, Scoring, and Awards

To establish the event as a formal contest, participants' readings were evaluated and awards were given. While one possible approach would be to remove evaluation and awards altogether—thus avoiding concerns about fairness or subjectivity—providing participants with feedback is a valuable part of the learning experience. This inevitably raises the question of what should be evaluated, by whom, and how.

Even in this contest, a considerable amount of time was spent by the organizing committee discussing these matters. The fact that evaluation criteria differed from teacher to teacher made it especially difficult to reach a consensus. This revealed how important it is to stay focused on the core purpose of the event—otherwise, the very meaning of the contest may become unstable at this stage. There was also discussion about how to present awards. This time, we were able to have the Dean formally present certificates of recognition. However, in the future, the method of awarding—as well as evaluation—will need further refinement to ensure fair and meaningful execution.

Oral reading is often viewed unfavorably from the standpoint of communicative language teaching. The difficulty level of the assigned texts was also frequently noted as too high for language learners. However, it is important to emphasize that this was not a simple oral reading event—it was a *recitation*

contest. Once learners begin to acquire a new language, they naturally seek exposure beyond the textbook. This desire is not limited to conversation; many want to listen to music in the language, watch films, and engage with more authentic forms of expression. One of the highest forms of language—literary prose—also inspires curiosity: What does it sound like when read aloud? How is it different from the language used in everyday study?

This contest aimed to respond to that curiosity. Furthermore, it served as a motivational bridge between language practice classes and literature-focused courses. The value of *recitation* should not be assessed solely by how well it improves vocabulary acquisition or pronunciation. Rather, it should be considered within the broader context of what it means to study as a university student. Otherwise, university language programs risk becoming indistinguishable from language centers, focused only on producing fluent speakers. From this perspective, it is vital to continue exploring the educational significance of integrating such extracurricular events into university life.

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