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The 21st Japanese Speech Contest for University Students



JAPAN FOUNDATION

In collaboration with:



第21回 大学生のための日本語スピーチコンテスト

Finals Day 決勝大会

Saturday 7th March 2026 3月7日(土)

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現代日本の動物福祉の現状

日本学を学ぶ者として、今まで主に日本人の日常生活、つまり人間社会に焦点を当てて研究してきた。しかし、日本の人間しか研究しないのでは、日本の文化や社会の一つの側面しかわからない。世界中のどこを見ても、動植物が孤立して存在することはめったにない。そして、どの時代でも人類の進化は絶えず自然史と繋がっていた。また、科学的な立場から見ると当たり前のようにあるかもしれないが、人間は鯨や猫と同じように動物界の一部にすぎない。つまり、動物界を視野にいれずして真に人間界を理解することはできないのである。

日本に住んだ際の様々な場所での経験から、日本の動物福祉に興味を持つようになった。動物福祉に関する日本の評判は複数の原因が重なり、あまりよくない。このスピーチでは、札幌で日常的に経験したことや日本のその他の地域で観察したことを通し、日本の動物福祉の現状を紹介する。まず、日本と西洋の両方の文脈において「動物福祉」という概念がどのような意味合いを持つか説明する。次に、日本にいる動物の生活の質がどの様にコントロールされているかを、他の国の姿勢と比べながら究明する。最後に、多様なケーススタディを通じ、日本人の日常生活における動物との関わり方の例を挙げ、日本の評判が悪いのは当然であるかどうかを論じる。この比較研究の方法を通じ、日本の動物の生活を向上できる方法を提案したいと思う。

The Current State of Animal Welfare in Modern Japan

As someone who studies Japan, my research so far has primarily focused on the human world and Japanese daily life. However, if we only research the people of Japan, we can only understand Japanese society and culture from one perspective. No matter where you look, the natural world does not exist in isolation. Likewise, human progress and natural history have been interlinked across history. Additionally, while it may seem obvious, from a scientific perspective, humans are just as much a part of the animal kingdom as a shark or a cat. In sum, we cannot truly understand the human world without engaging with the animal world.

For various reasons, Japan's reputation for animal welfare is considered low. Having lived in Japan, my interest in Japanese animal welfare is informed by my experiences there. In this speech, I introduce the current state of Japanese animal welfare using my experiences of daily life in Sapporo and observations made across Japan. Firstly, I explain the contrasting nuances of animal welfare terminology used in Japanese and Western contexts. I then examine how the quality of life of Japanese animals is regulated, and comparatively investigate this against Western attitudes. Finally, using a variety of case studies, I demonstrate how Japanese people interact with animals in daily life, and ask whether Japan's poor reputation for animal welfare is deserved. By using this comparative research method, I hope to be able to suggest methods for improving the lives of Japanese animals.

Peter Ashton

SOAS University of London

現実逃避の再考察

「現実逃避」とは何でしょうか。文字通りに受け取ると、「義務を回避する」「責任を放棄する」「現状を認めない」というように連想されがちでしょう。しかし、現実逃避として始まった日本語学習のおかげでこのコンテストに参加できるようになった私にとって、このネガティブな解釈にあまり賛成できません。現実逃避は、生きていく上で、本当に悪いことなのでしょうか。そうでなければ、その否定的な考え方は、どこから来たのでしょうか。確かに、辞書を紐解くと、「実際問題としてやらなくてはならないことを、意図的に避けようとする。また、その行為や心理状態」と書かれています。しかしながら、実際は、主にゲームや SNS などの「価値がない」というレッテルを社会に貼られた行動を指す傾向があると思います。そのような趣味への関心が現実逃避の結果であると思われた場合、批判される傾向が強いのではないのでしょうか。その一方、現実逃避の対象が仕事だと、話が違ってきます。過重労働が、人間関係や健康に対する不安からの逃避として始まった場合、生産性や具体的な成果を尊ぶ社会は、その行為を「現実逃避」とは言いません。かえって「やる気」、「責任感」として受け取られがちです。より健全な社会を培うために、生産性のみを尊ぶ姿勢を見直すべきでしょう。むしろ、精神衛生を保ち、達成感を得るために、十分に休憩をとることや好きな趣味での適度な憂さ晴らしを勧める社会を作ったほうがいいのではないのでしょうか。このスピーチを通じて、否定的に認識されがちな現実逃避を再考察したいと思います。

A Re-evaluation of Escapism

What exactly is 'escapism'? While our usage of the English term is perhaps less negative, the closest Japanese equivalent, *genjitsu tōhi*, is easily associated with dereliction of duty, unchecked indulgence, and unhealthy psychological diversion from reality. However, as my Japanese language study – without which I would not be participating today – itself began as 'escapism', I struggle to accept this conventional negative view. Is escapism really so detrimental to one's life? And if not, where does the stigma we ascribe to it come from? Japanese dictionaries commonly provide definitions such as: "Intentional avoidance of one's real-life obligations, or the actions and psychological state defining such avoidance". However, I would suggest that 'escapism' is disproportionately used to describe activities that society disparages as having no fundamental 'worth', such as videogames and social media. In cases where one's enthusiasm for such a hobby is perceived as straying towards 'escapism', there is a strong tendency to view it critically. The same cannot be said if one uses their job as a means of 'escape': if someone is driven to overwork out of a desire to escape anxieties in their home life, our society that prizes productivity and tangible gain would not call that 'escapism'. Rather, it is likely that such overworking would be labelled as 'diligent' or 'responsible'. In order to cultivate a healthier society, it is imperative that we review our blind focus on productivity. For us all to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, would it not be more beneficial to build a society that promotes adequate rest and, in moderation, engagement in our hobbies? Through this speech, I will re-evaluate escapism and the negative association it has conventionally been afforded.

Leon Fan

The University of Edinburgh

孤独でも輝ける: ひとりぼっちになった移民の話

17歳でスコットランドに移住した私は、今も孤独を感じている。多くの人が海外移住で慣れない言語や慣習に戸惑い、鬱に陥る。日本政府の調査によると、海外在住日本人の約3割もが孤独を感じている。それは言語や文化の違いに起因すると指摘されている。

私も移民後、高校で言語の壁などに悩んでいた。大学進学後さらに人見知りになった私は人と付き合うのが怖くなり人間関係をほぼ切ってしまった。このような問題を抱えている時に会ったのが『嫌われる勇気』という本だ。著書によると、自分の行動で人にどう思われるか考えたり、承認欲求を求めたりしない勇気を持ち、他人へ貢献することで、自分の価値が実感できる。そして、自分が共同体で役立つ存在だと思え、「ここにいてもいい」という所属感が得られる。

言葉で人と繋がれない時は、行動で好感を与えるだけでもよい。その勇気を持ち、共同体の一部になれるように、ボランティア活動や地元の祭りに参加したりするようになった。すると、次第に大学の活動にも参加できるようになってきた。

私は孤独を抱える人にこの演説を捧げたい。孤独でも輝ける。なぜなら、ありのままの自分で他者貢献する勇気さえあれば、孤独は成長への扉となるからだ。他者からの評価を気にせず、他者を信頼し、他者のために生きてこそ、自分自身の価値に気づくことができる。つまり、自己受容、他者信頼、他者貢献によって、誰もが自分らしく輝ける場所を発見できるのだ。

To Shine Even in Loneliness: The Story of a Lonely Immigrant

Having immigrated to Scotland at 17, I still feel lonely. Many people experience depression after moving abroad, struggling with unfamiliar languages and customs. According to a Japanese government survey, about 30% of Japanese people overseas experience loneliness attributed to language and cultural differences.

After immigrating, I also struggled with language barriers in high school. At university, I grew wary of interacting with others, almost cutting myself off from social connections. Then I found the book "The Courage to Be Disliked". According to the book, by having the courage not to worry about how others view your actions, discarding the desire for recognition, and contributing to others, you can realise your own worth. Then you see yourself as useful in the community and gain a sense of belonging, the feeling that "it's okay to be here."

When you cannot connect with others through words, you can still make a good impression through actions. With this courage, I began volunteering at events and local festivals to become part of the community and gradually re-engaged with university life.

I dedicate this speech to anybody experiencing loneliness. You can shine even in loneliness. If you have the courage to contribute to others as your true self, loneliness becomes your door to growth. Only by not worrying about others' judgment, trusting others, and living for others can you discover your own worth. Through self-acceptance, trust in others, and contribution to others, anybody can discover a place to shine in their own way.

Carol Pui Yi Liu

The University of Leeds

お茶が教えてくれた「つながり」の哲学

本スピーチでは、お茶を通して生まれる人と人、そして自分自身との「つながり」の大切さについて、私自身の経験をもとに、現代の私たちにどのような示唆を与えるかを考察します。

日本に留学して以来、私は茶道の哲学に強い興味がありました。そしてその哲学をさらに身に付けるため、今年の夏に、日本の製茶会社でインターンシップを経験し、製茶の現場に携わる機会を得ました。茶葉と向き合う日々の中で、お茶が単なる飲み物ではなく、人の心や関係に深く関わる存在であることを実感しました。

その中で、中国の白茶に関心を持つ社長から、日本の茶葉を使って白茶を作るという提案をいただきました。しかし、気候や設備の違いにより、中国の製法をそのまま再現することはできませんでした。そこで、限られた条件の中で現場にあるものを活かし、唯一無二の「日本式白茶」が生まれました。

この経験を通して、私は「侘び寂び」や「一期一会」が、単なる美意識ではなく、生きる姿勢そのものであることを実感しました。不完全さを受け入れ、その瞬間にしか出会えない価値を大切にすることが、深い「つながり」を生むのだと学びました。

効率や結果が重視され、デジタル化が進む現代社会において、人々は外部の評価や完璧なイメージに左右され、自分の内面の声や心の静けさを見失いがちです。だからこそ、一服のお茶を味わうような「間」を通して、お茶が教えてくれた「目に見えないつながり」の哲学が、自分らしさや周囲との関係を見つめ直すきっかけになればと考えています。

The Invisible Bridge in a Cup of Tea

My journey into the philosophy of tea ceremony began during my year abroad in Japan. This past summer, I immersed myself further through an internship at a Japanese tea company. There, I was given a unique challenge of creating a Chinese-style white tea using Japanese tea leaves.

Through this experience, I encountered first-hand the living philosophy of wabi-sabi (finding beauty in imperfection and limitation) and ichi-go ichi-e (treasuring each irreplaceable moment). With different climates and equipment, we could not create a perfect replica. Instead, we embraced the constraints, which led to the creation of a unique "Japanese-style white tea." This taught me that meaningful connection often blooms not in perfection, but in the graceful acceptance of things as they are.

In our modern world, driven by efficiency and digitalisation, we are often exhausted by the perfect images flooding social media. We chase external validation and results, risking the loss of our inner voice and the grace to accept our own imperfections.

In this speech, I reflect on the "invisible bridge" that a single cup of tea can build. It is a bridge that helps us reconnect with our inner selves and fosters genuine heart-to-heart bonds with others. I hope that the wisdom of connection woven by tea may offer a moment of pause, encouraging us to rediscover our authenticity and enrich our relationships in today's fast-paced world.

Thomas Merryfield

The University of Edinburgh

共存社会に向けて:LGBT を事例に「多数派」と「少数派」の関係を考える

本スピーチは、LGBT の経験を一つの事例として取り上げ、多数派と少数派が社会の中でどのように共存できるのかを考えるものである。私たちは皆同じ人間であるにも関わらず、性的指向、人種、性別、宗教、障害といった違いが、なぜ分断を生んでしまうのかという問いを提示する。

自身のカミングアウトの経験を通じて、「受け入れる」という行為が持つ感情的な複雑さを示し、それが決して簡単でも即座に達成できるものでもないことを明らかにする。この考察を起点として、理解促進を目的とする東京レインボーパレードのような社会的取り組みにも言及し、善意の活動であっても、場合によっては少数派と多数派の間に意図せず距離を生んでしまう可能性があることを指摘する。そのため、共存のためには対立を煽る空間ではなく、社会規範を尊重しつつ、相互理解を促す場が不可欠であると主張する。

さらに、LGBT への抵抗感には人間が本来的に持つ「未知への恐怖」に根ざしていることを提案し、価値観の変化は強制的な同意ではなく、実際の共存経験を通じて生まれることを、調査や研究結果をもとに論じる。

結論として、共存は片方からではなく、多数派と少数派がお互いに理解しようと努めることで実現されると述べる。そのため、少数派には多数派の理解を促す姿勢が求められ、多数派には少数派は全く変わらない存在だと認識することが重要だ。私たちは、人種、性別、宗教などで、誰もが人生の中で多数派にも少数派にもなり得るため、多数派と少数派の双方の視点から考えていく必要があると結論づける。

Towards a Society of Coexistence: Rethinking Minority and Majority Relations from an LGBT Perspective

My speech explores how majority and minority groups can coexist in society, using the experiences of LGBT people as a case study. It asks why, despite all being humans, differences such as sexuality, race, gender, disability, or religion often lead to misunderstanding and division.

Drawing on my personal coming-out experience, my speech highlights the emotional complexity of acceptance and challenges the assumption that it is a simple or immediate process. This reflection leads to a broader discussion of social efforts, such as Tokyo's Rainbow Parade, which aims to promote understanding but can sometimes unintentionally create distance between the minority and majority. I argue that genuine coexistence requires shared spaces that do not foster divide, but rather encourage mutual understanding while respecting social norms.

I move on to suggest that resistance to LGBT people is often rooted in a natural human fear of the unknown. Research and surveys support this claim, showing that value changes emerge through lived experiences rather than forced agreement.

The speech concludes that coexistence is not achieved unilaterally, but through sustained efforts by both sides. Accordingly, I argue that minorities should adopt an approach that helps foster understanding among the majority. At the same time, the majority should recognise that the minority are no different from themselves. Since anyone may become a majority or minority at varying points in life due to race, gender, religion, sexuality, etc., my speech ultimately emphasises the importance of examining coexistence from both majority and minority perspectives.

Abstracts

Individual Presentation Category

1) Ria Kosaka

The University of Leeds

桃太郎の謎

The Mystery of Momotaro

2) Jessie Baker

Newcastle University

オルタナティブな人(変わり者?ユニークな人?)

What is 'Alternative'?

3) Yui Shing Kwok

Keele University

僕の先生は日本の動画配信者

My teachers are Japanese video creators.

4) Leah Foster

The University of Cambridge

日本のオタク文化における過剰消費の問題

The Problem of Overconsumption in Japanese Otaku Culture

5) Stella Shi

The University of Warwick

小さな美しさ、大きな力

Tiny Beauty, Mighty Strength

Ria Kosaka

The University of Leeds

桃太郎の謎

The Mystery of Momotaro

Presentation Abstract:

How much do we really know about the Japanese folktale Momotaro? Is it simply just a story about a boy born from a peach who travelled with his three friends to defeat the "Oni" (the ogres) who threatened his village? Are folktales really just a story to be told to children for their enjoyment? This presentation will explore the deeper, complex meanings and history behind what is arguably Japan's most well-known folktale. This presentation aims to encourage you to look further into and explore the meanings of other folktales, both Japanese and non-Japanese.

Jessie Baker

Newcastle University

オルタナティブな人(変わり者?ユニークな人?)

What is 'Alternative'?

Presentation Abstract:

In Japan, being "alternative" is often understood in a fashion-related sense, where standing out within a group that appreciates a particular style or subculture can be valued. Conversely, western ideas of 'alternative' are rooted in left-wing political movements. The associated music and beliefs are frequently met with hostility and fear-mongering, and as a result, many alternative people have been subjected to bullying, harassment, and in extreme cases, violent attacks. What has created this divide, and how can we combat it?

Yui Shing Kwok
Keele University

僕の先生は日本の動画配信者
My teachers are Japanese video creators.

Presentation Abstract:

Online video creators are everywhere, sharing funny stories, and playing the latest video games. But have you ever imagined that someone sees them as their teachers? I've learned Japanese, culture, and even life lessons from every video and stream I watch. This presentation is going to share about how Japanese video creators became my teachers, how I learn Japanese through this unique way and how they transformed me from a typical otaku (introvert nerd) into a whole new person.

Leah Foster
The University of Cambridge

日本のオタク文化における過剰消費の問題
The Problem of Overconsumption in Japanese Otaku Culture

Presentation Abstract:

My presentation is on the consumer behaviour and psychology of "Otaku" in Japan, with a particular focus on overconsumption. I look at the issue of overconsumption in Otaku Culture from an environmental lens, investigating the relative environmental impact of Otaku consumer habits compared to general consumption. The consumer psychology of Otaku is unique in that buying merchandise related to one's "Oshi" (bias) is a measure of one's commitment. I also discuss who the onus of ethical consumption lies upon, and how we can all make efforts to enjoy our hobbies while being mindful of our individual environmental impact.

Stella Shi
The University of Warwick

小さな美しさ、大きな力
Tiny Beauty, Mighty Strength

Presentation Abstract:

In a society like Japan, where advanced cosmetic medicine is highly developed, beauty often appears measurable and attainable. Alongside AI-generated faces and beauty filters, ideas of "perfect beauty" are constantly presented to us. This speech explores beauty not as something to be fixed or perfected, but as self-acceptance shaped through self-care and inner resilience. Through personal experience, it reflects on how small self-care actions can restore confidence and courage to feel beautiful again. Ultimately, it invites the audience to reconsider who defines beauty, and to recognise it as a quiet yet powerful force supporting us through vulnerability.

Abstracts

Group Presentation Category

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1) 恋愛凡人たち Romance Amateurs

The University of Reading

(Sam Wilkins, Tiffany Bantin-Herridge, Isaac Lau)

イギリスで最高の初デート

The Best First Date in the UK

2) ザ・ウォーリックエクスプレス The Warwick Express

The University of Warwick

(Luaidh Williams, Hanqing Du)

200 歳のお誕生日おめでとう!! -イギリスの鉄道の 200 年-

Congratulations on your 200th birthday!!

3) チッピーバーム Chippy Barm

The University of Lancashire

(Samuel James McGrath, Marnie Josefina Chambers)

イギリスのサブカルチャーの歴史

A History of British Subcultures

4) 言葉の万華鏡 Kaleidoscope of Languages

Imperial College London

(Yunlan Hou, Niki Kan, Chenxuan Xi, Jay Dong)

世界の英語のアクセント

Diverse English accent around the world

5) パイレーツ・オブ・ネス湖 Pirates of Loch Ness

The University of Edinburgh

(Libby Jackson, Dwij Zhaoyi Kwai-Pun, Louie Dunbar)

ラ・ブーシュと 18 世紀の海賊の栄光

La Buse and Piracy's Glory During the 18th Century

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恋愛凡人たち Romance Amateurs

The University of Reading

イギリスで最高の初デート

The Best First Date in the UK

Presentation Abstract:

Three bright-eyed amateurs in the battlefield of romance discover they each have an upcoming first date. Confident the date locations they planned are the best in the UK, they began to debate amongst themselves, sharing some historical context on their proposals. However, they are unfortunately met with criticisms and complications that causes them to bicker. This leaves them disheartened, wondering if there is such a thing as a 'best' first date. However, the answer which they are desperately seeking may be closer than they think!

ザ・ウォーリックエクスプレス The Warwick Express

The University of Warwick

200 歳のお誕生日おめでとう!! -イギリスの鉄道の 200 年-

Congratulations on your 200th birthday!!

Presentation Abstract:

In 2025, the British railway service celebrated its 200th anniversary, an event which was commemorated by the Railway 200 program. This presentation begins with a brief overview of the development of the railway

service during that time, looking at some of the ways it has influenced transport, infrastructure, and the economy. We end by sharing some of our own thoughts on our experiences using trains in the UK, explaining how they've helped us in our own lives, and some of the ways in which the British railway service differs from that in Japan.

チッピーバーム Chippy Barm
The University of Lancashire

イギリスのサブカルチャーの歴史
A History of British Subcultures

Presentation Abstract:

Our presentation will introduce a selection of the most influential youth subcultures in Britain, and address how these intriguing groups of young people formed and evolved through the years. By looking at a variety of examples from history, we will explore how music and fashion can foster a shared sense of belonging and purpose between individuals. Following this, we will discuss how young people's lives are increasingly being spent online and how this shift has affected the prevalence and characteristics of youth subcultures among British teenagers today.

言葉の万華鏡 Kaleidoscope of Languages
Imperial College London

世界の英語のアクセント
Diverse English accent around the world

Presentation Abstract:

This presentation explores the diversity of English accents worldwide, viewing them as a “kaleidoscope” shaped by history, society, and first-language influence. Focusing on British English, Singapore English, and Chinese-accented English, it explains how factors such as colonial history, education systems, and phonological differences affect pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation. Through phonetic explanations and live demonstrations using the same sentence, the talk highlights that accents are not errors but meaningful linguistic variation. Ultimately, it emphasises that effective communication values diversity over uniformity in spoken English.

パイレーツ・オブ・ネス湖 Pirates of Loch Ness
The University of Edinburgh

ラ・ブーシュと 18 世紀の海賊の栄光
La Buse and Piracy's Glory during the 18th Century

Presentation Abstract:

The Golden Age of Piracy fell between the 1650s and 1730s when the most infamous pirates roamed the seas. Today we will be exploring the life and death of one such pirate - Olivier Levasseur - or better known as 'La Buse'. Known both for his ruthlessness and the masses of treasure from ships he plundered, his legacy remains known to this day across the Indian Ocean. He is famous to this day due to the myth of his hidden treasure, believed to be buried in Reunion Island and found by solving a cryptogram he threw at the time of his execution. Join us as we find out what a pirate's life was really like.