

Exploring the Educational Benefits of Learning to Write English Haiku

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Exploring the Educational Benefits of Learning to Write English Haiku 英語俳句の教育的効用の探求——公開講座を例に

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Abstract

This paper seeks to elucidate the educational benefits of learning English haiku (referred to as HAIKU hereafter) within the framework of a ninety-minute creative writing lecture in a Japanese classroom. To achieve this goal, the paper examines a specific instance of an open lecture titled “Learning HAIKU from Mid-century American Literature: from Theoretical Reading to HAIKU Ceremony,” which took place at Kanazawa University on June 27, 2024. This event was part of the “‘Reading and Speaking’ Cultures in World Language” program within the Open Lecture of Country Series at Kanazawa University. The paper will outline the lecture’s content, class activities, and the materials distributed, as well as the methodologies employed and the objectives set for each activity. The final section will engage in a discussion on the educational and cross-lingual effects of learning to write HAIKU (English haiku) and the process of translating these compositions back into Japanese haiku.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the educational benefits of learning to write English haiku (referred as HAIKU hereafter) and the process of translating them into Japanese haiku through a ninety-minute lecture. The discussion is based on the open lecture titled “Learning HAIKU from Mid-century American Literature: from Theoretical Reading to HAIKU Ceremony,” which took place on June 27, 2024, at the Kanazawa Station Satellite seminar room of Kanazawa University. This event was part of the “‘Reading and Speaking’ Cultures in World Language (English series)” program, which focuses on various genres of texts written in languages other than Japanese.

These open lecture series aim to enhance participants’ understanding of the societies and cultures reflected in these languages, alongside the historical contexts that shaped their creation. The lectures also provide opportunities for participants to contemplate the mechanisms and methods used to express ideas in the target language, engage with the culture through its language, and articulate their subjective and artistic emotions in an objective manner.

The English series included other open lectures, such as “English Grammar Envisioned from English History” and “Cross-Cultural Understanding by Contrasting Japanese and English,” presented by Professor Takeshi Koguma, as well as “Acting Shakespeare,” conducted by Professor Kana Oyabu. While these lectures emphasized the knowledge of the English language, its historical development,

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and the experience of performing Shakespearean texts in English, this paper's focus was on creative writing, allowing participants to explore the expression of personal emotions and observations through HAIKU in a cross-lingual context.

In this paper, the PowerPoint slides presented during the lecture and the accompanying worksheet will be comprehensively introduced, detailing their purpose and function throughout the session. However, due to strict privacy regulations governing research at Kanazawa University, this paper was not able to get permission to directly showcase the participants' achievements; instead, it will indirectly reference accomplishments made by the author as "mock samples." Also, since the feedback collected from the lecture participants cannot be displayed without formal procedures, this paper will indirectly present the feedback received and aim to support the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach, concluding with summary statements.

2. The lecture's goal and its flow

The lecture, conducted in Japanese, aimed to inspire participants to write HAIKU by exploring the history, culture, and ideals of American mid-century culture. This period saw the translation of Japanese haiku into a distinct form, with many innovative writers expressing their poetic aesthetics through this medium. The session began with an introductory overview of the historical context, followed by a focus on the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), which is a prominent spatial representation of mid-century American culture. Wright's work serves as an excellent visual example, as the minimalist aesthetic of his architecture aligns with the principles of Japanese haiku, particularly in its structural organization.

The lecture began with an exploration of cultural understanding, then shifted to examine the renowned HAIKUs composed by Modernist poet Ezra Pound, beat poet Jack Kerouac, and celebrated twentieth-century American poet Gary Snyder. After delving into the HAIKU culture that emerged in mid-century America, the lecture reviewed the original format and philosophy of Japanese haiku, presenting two examples of HAIKUs that adhered to the traditional 5-7-5 syllable structure, along with their translated Japanese counterparts.

Participants began the writing process outlined in the distributed worksheet, selecting a season, theme, and emotion to express through their HAIKUs. As they worked on the worksheet, they shared their HAIKUs aloud within their assigned small groups, focusing on the rhythm of the syllables and the melodic flow of their narratives. The lecturer moved between the groups to provide guidance on syllable structure and encouraged participants to submit their works on a separate sheet. This would allow for individualized feedback during the class contest held at the end of the lecture.

Ultimately, each participant presented their HAIKUs by reading it aloud to the entire class during the HAIKU contest. The lecturer provided immediate feedback after the presentations and returned the works with comments.

3. Participants of the lecture

There were approximately twelve participants, with a balanced representation of both males and females and ages ranging from the teens to the eighties. Notably, one participant's native language was different from Japanese. The program brochure made it clear that the lecture involved active learning in English and did not require advanced English proficiency. As a result, all participants appeared to have received at least six years of formal English education during their junior high and high school years. From the lecturer's experience, all but one high school student seemed to have undergone formal college-level English education.

4. The lecture menu

The open lecture comprised three main sections: exploring the history of midcentury America, an introduction to HAIKU, and the practice of writing HAIKU. The table of contents, presented in Japanese, was displayed on PowerPoint slides. The accompanying worksheet was distributed only after the lecture progressed to Section C.

Today's Menu
Section A. What is "Midcentury American Culture"?
Part 1. Time, culture, ideals
Part 2. Representative designs and its philosophy
Section B. What is HAIKU?
Part 1. HAIKU by American poets
Part 2. HAIKU as Creative Writing
Section C. Let's write HAIKU!
Part 1. Practice writing HAIKU (or SENRYU) with examples
Part 2. Translating HAIKU into Japanese haiku
Part 3. How to write a HAIKU, adjust the syllables
Part 4. Write and Translate your HAIKU
Part 5. Sing HAIKU
Part 6. HAIKU contest and feedback

5. The lecture and its components

In Part I Section A. What is "Midcentury American Literature?" the following slide was exhibited. The text was presented in Japanese.

What is midcentury American Culture?

<Historical time>

Midcentury in the United States refers to the period “after World War II until the end of the 1970s.”

<Culture>

After the war, the Cold War structure established by the polarization between the two superpowers— the Soviet communist camp and the American liberal capitalist camp— created a closed environment that allowed the unique culture of Pax Americana to thrive.

<Ideals>

While inheriting the ideas of the Western modernist art movement that developed from World War I until the midcentury, ideas of “modernity” and “return to America” were stylized by America’s white elites.

Section A, Part 1 aimed to immerse participants in the historical context of midcentury American culture, illustrating its development within the geopolitical landscape of the time. It explained how this culture thrived under Pax Americana, a state of relative peace stemming from the Cold War stalemate. With this broad understanding established, participants then explored how American white elites—and artists—shaped the midcentury ideal, drawing inspiration from the concepts of modernity and a desire to return to America’s core values.

In Part 2, participants were presented with five architectural images of Frank Lloyd Wright to illustrate how the “minimalistic” aesthetic was embodied in many grand structures of his era. The images featured included the “Rosenbaum House” (1889), “Fallingwater, Pennsylvania” (1936), “The Darwin D. Martin House, New York” (1905), and “The Guggenheim Museum, New York” (1959). Following the viewing of these images, participants engaged in a discussion about their minimalist impressions of Wright’s works for two to three minutes. The lecturer facilitated brief analyses of the images presented.

In Section B, Part 1, a sample HAIKU by Ezra Pound (1885–1972) was displayed in large font.

B. What is HAIKU?

Part 1. HAIKU by American poets

Ezra Pound (1885–1972) Modernism/ Imagism/ Vorticism

“On ‘In a Station of the Metro’” (1914)

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals on a wet, black bough.

The HAIKU by Ezra Pound¹ presents a unique challenge that requires some time to grasp its essence, which differs somewhat from traditional Japanese haiku. Participants spent approximately four to five minutes delving into the

work to foster a solid understanding. Once they achieved this comprehension, they were encouraged to read the HAIKU aloud multiple times, focusing on the 5-7-5 syllable rhythm.

As a second example, the HAIKU of the famous Beat poet Jack Kerouac² (1922–1969) was introduced.

Jack Kerouac (1922–1969), BEAT Poet

Missing a kick
at the icebox door
It closed anyway

In this session, participants were invited to analyze the HAIKU independently and discuss its themes with their neighbors. Kerouac’s HAIKU serves as a strong example of how HAIKU can seamlessly blend down-to-earth themes with elements of comedy. This particular piece was selected because the author vividly illustrates a moment of

continuous movement through bodily actions and physical phenomena, making it accessible for everyone to grasp. The lecturer intentionally left the HAIKU unexplained to encourage exploration. Additionally, Gary Snyder’s HAIKU was introduced and discussed.

In Section B, Part 2, the lecture spent about 5 minutes relearning the nature of HAIKU. The slide was as follows in Japanese.

¹ qtd. in Smith, Richard Eugene. “Ezra Pound and the Haiku.” *College English*, vol. 26, No. 7, 1965, p. 522. (Originally in “Contemporaria.” *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. 2:1, 1913, p. 12.)

² Kerouac, Jack. *Scattered Poems*. City Lights, 1971, pg. 71.

HAIKU as Creating Writing

Haiku (+ senryu), which has been composed in Europe and the United States, is basically an English poem with a total of 17 syllables, in a 5-7-5 syllable format.

In the case of haiku, the poem is placed at the center of “nature,” and while deeply feeling the manifestation of all things derived from human sensibilities, the poem expresses that emotion.

On the other hand, in the case of senryu, “humans” are the center of the world.

Part 2 clarified the form, perspective, and sensibility of HAIKU, distinguishing it from Senryu, which is another 5-7-5 syllable poem that does not include a seasonal word. The lecturer emphasized that Senryu primarily concerns the human experience rather than nature without a seasonal image.

Section C, Part 1 focused on the practice of writing HAIKU by using syllable patterns. Since HAIKU must include a seasonal word, the section began by introducing a simpler model called SENRYU (not to be confused with the traditional Japanese senryu, as this version is written only in English). This model was published in a journal³ authored by the lecturer. The following slide illustrates this concept.

Practice writing HAIKU (or SENRYU) with examples

<Theme: English Grammar>

1 2 3 4 5

Study of Grammar

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

The eagerer you lecture

1 2 3 4 5

People fall asleep

This sarcastic SENRYU highlights the unfortunate reality of teaching English grammar to Japanese students, where the more enthusiasm the teacher puts into the lesson, the more likely the students are to doze off. While this represents a straightforward

learning model, the lecturer eventually asked the participants to translate the SENRYU into Japanese senryu. After five minutes, the lecturer invited three students to share their translations. Subsequently, he presented his own version in the following slide.

³ Kawada, Eisuke. “Creative Writing.” *1000 hour Hearing Marathon, English Journal*. Alc, January 2018, p. 106.

英文法
熱く語れば
皆眠る

This⁴ 5/7/5 syllable structure of the Japanese senryu serves as an effective icebreaker for those experiencing writer's block, as it combines, without a seasonal expression, a humorous context with relatable themes for English language learners. While this was the initial example, a second model⁵ was subsequently introduced as outlined below.

<Theme: Creative Writing>

1 2 3 4 5

Creative writing

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Even without a lecture

1 2 3 4 5

We get excited

Translate the SENRYU into Japanese on your worksheet!

Also, start working on Practices A, B, C.

The worksheet was distributed at this point so participants could start building their own HAIKU or Senryu in steps. Soon after, the translation was displayed as follows.

創作は
講じなくとも
皆萌える

The worksheet contained the following practices. First, Practice A, B, and C, are practices for translation.⁶

⁴ Kawada, January 2018, p. 106.

⁵ Kawada, January 2018, p. 106.

⁶ These HAIKU and SENRYU were published as the winners of the HAIKU contest of the journal. The authors for each work are, Practice A: "Kaori-san," Practice B: "Midori Takahashi," and Practice C: "YoN," and the first two works were published in, Kawada, Eisuke. "Creative Writing." *1000 hour Hearing Marathon, English Journal*. Alc, April 2018, pp. 106–107.

Translate the text of the Practices below.		
<Practice A>	<Practice B>	<Practice C>
Late Cherry Flowers	Wonderers of Gene	In my dream of bed
Bring a lot of memories of my grandfather	only traits I don't like my son succeeds	I cuddle my lovely dog over the rainbow bridge

After completing the translation exercises, the lecture proceeded to Section 3, Part 3: “How to Write a HAIKU and Adjust the Syllables.” Participants were instructed to tackle Practices D, E, and F, which involved editing the text to modify the syllable structure. This activity is designed to provide hands-on experience with the editing process before they compose their own HAIKU at the end of the class.⁷

Adjust the syllables into 5/7/5 form.		
<Practice D>	<Practice E>	<Practice F>
Heard long no see	Talking with my little niece	hard as it is
20 years made change	we find our good points	I never want to give up
who is that man	we smile well each other	learning English

The responses to these practices varied in several ways. Some altered the singular and plural forms of nouns, while others changed the tense or even the narrative itself. These syllable editing exercises provide valuable practice for writing HAIKU and SENRYU, as they also enhance awareness of English accents. Many Japanese Katakana words that mimic the sounds of English words tend to lose their original accents once they are transformed into Katakana.

After practicing syllable adjustment, participants moved on to Section 3, Part 4: “Write and Translate your Haiku.” They then proceeded to Practices G, H, I, J, K, and L, which guided them in building their haiku step by step.

⁷ Kawada, April 2018, pp. 106–107. The author of Practice D: “Kum.” The author for Practice E: “Jen” and Practice F: “Arinko” were not published but were submitted to the contest and were very close to being awarded. They missed the award for inaccuracy of the 5/7/5 syllable form.

<Practice G>

When is the season of your HAIKU? (Spring/Summer/Fall/Winter)

<Practice H>

Decide a theme and material.

Theme: () Material ()

<Practice I>

What kind of emotion do you wish to convey?

()

<Practice J>

Write a scene in one sentence that includes the above information.

<Practice K>

Divide the image of the above sentence into three pictures and describe them in three short sentences.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

<Practice L>

Adjust the above three sentences respectively into the following.

(5 syllables) _____

(7 syllables) _____

(5 syllables) _____

Following the completion of Practices G to L, the lecture progressed to Part 3, Section 4: “Write and Translate Your HAIKU.” Participants were tasked with composing and translating their HAIKUs and SENRYUs into Japanese, adhering to the 5/7/5 syllable structure on a separate sheet. Once this task was completed, the participants were divided into four groups, each consisting of four individuals. They then moved into Part 3, Section 5: “Sing Your HAIKU,” where participants presented their HAIKU or SENRYU to their group members. It was emphasized that they should be encouraged to read their works and translations aloud, allowing members to fully appreciate the artistry involved.

After group presentations, participants progressed to Part 3, Section 6: “HAIKU contest and

feedback,” where the lecturer tasked participants to submit both of their work in a separate sheet for the contest. The task of the <HAIKU contest> was to write one’s HAIKU and its translation in Japanese simultaneously following the 5/7/5 syllable form.

HAIKU:

俳句 :

Every participant was able to submit their <HAIKU contest> sheet within 15 minutes without any assistance from the lecturer.

6. Mock results and evaluations

All participants successfully submitted their HAIKU contest sheets within the designated timeframe. Furthermore, the majority of the submitted HAIKUs were quite impressive, with only a handful of participants requiring further adjustments. It would be beneficial to showcase "mock samples" imitating the achievements. The actual accomplishments of the participants displayed levels and characteristics comparable to the following HAIKUs.

MOCK SAMPLES A to F

A. “Happiness”

My delightful days
whose grandsons visit me
and they leave cheerfully

うれしさは
孫が来るのと
帰ると

B. “TOFU”

Eating cold tofu dish
Sweet, soft, also cool feeling
I find summer soon

冷ややっこ
甘・柔・冷
夏が来る

C: "Going Home"

After the rain
beyond the rainbow
what can you see

雨上がり
虹の向こうに
何見える

D: "Hydrangea"

It pours rain
Hydrangea blooms well in rain
It perfumes so well

雨の中
咲くあじさい
いいにおい

E: "Hunger"

Way back home
with sense of hunger
I walk fast

帰り路
空腹感から
早歩き

F: "Bird in the Morning"

In the morning
I find a bird singing on roof
Sorrow is gone

朝の鳥
鳥のさえずり
悩みが消える

These "mock samples" achievements were assessed based on four criteria: the 5/7/5 rhythm, the emotional vividness, the imagery, and adherence to traditional Japanese haiku forms, as illustrated in the chart below. This chart displays how the lecturer provided evaluations, feedback, and the points awarded (note that it does not represent the actual evaluations conducted in the classroom since the original HAIKUS cannot be exhibited). For each mistake or identified weakness, one point was deducted from their HAIKUS.

Mock evaluation of Mock samples

Title/ /10 points (2.5 each)	5/7/5 syllables	vividness of emotion	vividness of the picture	Japanese haiku (translation)	Total Score
A: Happiness	0.5 points: the syllables are	2.5 points: The happy	2.5 points: the picture is	2.5 points: perfect rhythm	8

	written in 6/7/6 rhythm	emotion is vivid	clear	and vividness	
B: TOFU	2.5 points: perfect 5/7/5 rhythm	2.5 points: the happiness of feeling good taste is vivid	2.5 points: the picture of summer is vivid	2.5 points: perfect rhythm and vividness	10
C: Going Home	0 points: the syllable structure is 4/5/4	2.5 points: the emotion of wonder is vivid	2.5 points: the picture of the rainbow and sky is vivid	2.5 points: perfect rhythm and vividness	7.5
D: Hydrangea	0 points: the syllable structure is 3/10/5	2.5 points: the emotion is vivid	0.5 points: the pronoun and two “rains” prevent the full picture	1.5 points: the syllable structure is 5/6/5	4.5
E: Hunger	0 points: the syllable structure is 3/5/3	2.5 points: the hunger is vivid	2.5 points: the picture of going home is vivid	1.5 points: the syllable structure is 5/8/5	6.5
F: Bird in the Morning	0 points: the syllable structure is 4/9/4	2.5 points: the emotion is vivid	2.5 points: vivid picture	1.5 points: the syllable structure is 5/7/7	6.5

The feedback provided during the lecture was verbal and reiterated similar comments noted earlier. These six mock-samples' average score is 7.2 points. If these mock samples accurately resemble the original HAIKUs presented in class, these figures indicate that they acquired 71% of the knowledge and techniques required for crafting HAIKU in just 90 minutes.

7. Conclusion

The ninety-minute lecture provided an overview of the background and methodology for writing HAIKU, and it appears to be an effective pedagogical approach for helping learners acquire this new artistic skill in a foreign language. While the findings cannot be exactly presented here, feedback from the questionnaire conducted after the open lecture supported this conclusion. Most participants expressed satisfaction with the session, indicating that they enjoyed the experience and gained valuable knowledge related to this new skill. Following the lecture, the instructor engaged with the

participants and learned that they felt revitalized by re-examining the significance of English accents and syllables.

From the lecturer's perspective, this open lecture provided a refreshing opportunity for participants to revisit foundational knowledge of the English language. In fact, while the content may not have introduced anything new, the approach and materials presented felt innovative to the attendees of the lecture. This serves as a crucial indication that English language education could be significantly more effective if the teaching methods, techniques, and themes appear original and engaging to students. What was perhaps particularly novel about this lecture was its incorporation of the participants' prior knowledge of the Japanese language by prompting them to translate their own English into Japanese. This task effectively aligns the learners' understanding of English with their native language, enhancing their comprehension of the interconnections and interconvertibility between English and Japanese. As a next step, it might be beneficial to plumb the benefit of learning to write HAIKU and its translation with students whose first language is not Japanese. In conclusion, learning to write HAIKU undoubtedly offers positive educational benefits for native Japanese students studying English.