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### **Specific linguistic features of haiku texts**

Haiku. What is it about this small poem that makes people all over the world want to read and write them? *Nick Virgilio*, one of America's first major haiku poets, once said that he wrote haiku "to get in touch with the real". And the Haiku Society of America has called haiku a "poem in which Nature is linked to human nature". We all want to know what is real and to feel at one with the natural world. Haiku helps us to experience the everyday things around us vividly and directly, so we see them as they really are, as bright and fresh as they were when we first saw them as children. Haiku is basically about living with intense awareness, having openness to the existence around us. A kind of openness that involves seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

A haiku is not just a pretty picture in three lines of 5-7-5 syllables each. In fact, most haiku in English are not written in 5-7-5 syllables at all — many are not even written in three lines. What distinguishes a haiku is concision, perception and awareness — not a set number of syllables. A haiku is a short poem recording the essence of a moment keenly perceived in which Nature is linked to human nature. As *Roland Barthes* has pointed out, this record neither describes nor defines, but "diminishes to the point of pure and sole designation". The poem is refined into a touchstone of suggestiveness. In the mind of an aware reader it opens again into an image that is immediate and palpable, and pulsing with that delight of the senses that carries a conviction of one's unity with all of existence. A haiku can be anywhere from a few to 17 syllables, rarely more. It is now known that about 12-not 17 syllables in English are equivalent in length to the 17 *onji* (sound-symbols) of the Japanese haiku. A number of poets are writing them shorter than that. But despite their simplicity, haiku can be very demanding of both writer and reader, being at the same time one of the most accessible and inaccessible kinds of poetry. *R. H. Blyth*, the great translator of

Japanese haiku, wrote that a haiku is "an open door which looks shut". To see what a haiku suggests, the reader must share in the creative process, being willing to associate and pick up on the echoes implicit in the words. A wrong focus, or lack of awareness, and he will see only a closed door.

A great number of scientific debates are held, a great number of scientific works have been issued to touch the problem of haiku – one the most important forms of traditional Japanese poetry.

English haiku text are **the object** of the course paper; linguistic peculiarities of abovementioned Japanese poetry.

**The actuality** of the course paper is based on the fact that modern linguistics tends to study different kinds of text, poetic text included. Besides, poetry is a universal means of cultural integration; it uses the universal language of the world.

**The aim** of the investigation is as follows: to analyze linguistic peculiarities of the English haiku texts, their basic and specific characteristics.

**Methods** applied in the research are conditioned by the aim and the nature of the investigation, viz.: descriptive-analytical, structurally-semantic, and lexical analyses.

The aim and the subject determine the following **tasks**:

- to give the definition and the essence of haiku;
- to observe the history, origin and influence of classical and traditional haiku;
- to study contemporary haiku, its philosophy and art;
- to find out structural, lexico-stylistic and graphic peculiarities of haiku.

**The theoretical significance** of the course paper lies in the fact that the investigation of linguistic peculiarities of English haiku texts can be considered as the systematization of theoretical material on the issue under discussion.

**The practical significance** of the course paper implies the possibility of using its results in the theoretical courses in English Lexicology, Stylistics, and Composition.

## **STRUCTURAL PECULIARITIES OF HAIKU**

What is the proper form for haiku in English? Well, a simple definition might be a poem that captures a 'moment in time', usually involving nature, and as perceived or experienced by the poet. It is recorded in less than seventeen syllables, usually in three

lines, and usually with the centerline longer than the others, sometimes with a seasonal reference, or 'kigo'. Although many times a 5-7-5 pattern is prescribed as a 'firm' rule in rudimentary definitions of haiku this is not supported by research, translation, or history, even in Japanese haiku.

One component that does appear critical is a 'break', 'cutting word', or 'turn', which usually occurs between the second and third lines, but can occur also in the second line, but a 'break' or shift of perspective that juxtaposes the other images in the poem is considered by many as an important aspect of haiku. There are many 'schools' of haiku, both in Japanese and the English, and there always have been. In fact *Basho*, considered by most scholars to be the Father of the modern haiku, told his students to: "Learn the rules, so that you can break the rules". Today three lines, two lines, single line, and 'Zip' poems all offer the sincere student of this poetic form realistic option to pursue in finding their personal approach to haiku.

### **NUMBER OF LINES**

Usually haiku are written in three lines. Since Japanese haiku are written on one line, with no spacing between the segments, there is no danger of disrupting the flow in this manner. It is merely an artifact borne of the linguistic differences between the two languages and of the three-line convention of English haiku that makes the former appear as if it does not have a classic form.

The form of haiku that has continued most in favor in English is the otherwise free-form three liners, often written with the second line slightly longer than the first and third. They are usually written in less than seventeen syllables. Though a few poets still write in the five-seven-five syllable form, this form is now mostly written by schoolchildren as an exercise to learn how to count syllables, by beginners who know little about the true essence of haiku, or by those who just like to have a strict form with which to practice.

The one-line haiku, and the two-line, that were quite popular in the early and mid-eighties, are now a more occasional phenomenon:

**along the graveyard fence**

**a little girl picks daisies**

Paul Mena

**so many question marks and  
commas during the rain**

Elena Talayeva

The one-line is very hard to write successfully, though some of the most outstanding haiku in English have been in one line:

**The old pond, aye! And the sound of a frog leaping into the water.**

Basil Hall Chamberlain

However, there is more "internal" reason for three lines, which is defined (mostly) by the structure and the average length of the unit of Japanese speech (and thus in poetry), and by the structure of haiku-images.

To work as a haiku a concrete poem has to be simple and direct. They must reveal the essence of whatever image they are trying to evoke immediately, without their graphic configuration calling such attention to itself, or to the writer's ingenuity, as to distract us from that image.

#### **TEIKEI AS A SPECIFIC SYLLABLE RHYTHM OF HAIKU.**

#### **FLEXIBILITY IN THE SYLLABLE PATTERN**

Japanese haiku have been traditionally composed in 5-7-5 syllables (teikei). When poets started writing English haiku in the 1950's, they adopted this 5-7-5 form, thinking it created a similar condition for English-language haiku. This style is what is generally considered "traditional" English haiku.

Over the years, however, most haiku poets in North America have become aware that 17 English syllables convey a great deal more information than 17 Japanese syllables, and have come to write haiku in fewer syllables, most often in three segments that follow a short-long-short pattern without a rigid structure. This style is called by some "free-form" haiku.

The 5-7-5 syllable rhythm in Japanese haiku is not the matter of arbitrary choice that it may appear to be to a non-Japanese haiku writer. Various combinations of 5 and 7 syllables have dominated the Japanese literary scene for most of its history, tanka (5-7-5- 7-7) being the most prominent example. Because of these rhythmic structures,

Japanese haiku and tanka can be memorized with little or no effort, which is one of the major reasons for the longevity of these literary forms. On the other hand, there is no such inherent mnemonic quality to 5-7-5 English haiku, which are indeed difficult to commit to memory. Moreover, there is no discernible rhythmic structure to such an arrangement, due to the disparate length of English syllables. (The mnemonic quality of 5-7-5 Japanese phrases is much closer to that of metered rhymes in English.) These factors combined with the fact that English carries significantly more information per syllable than Japanese indicate that using the 5-7-5 form does not necessarily provide an analogous condition for writing haiku in English.

This is not to say, however, that all who write in 5-7-5 should stop doing so. The 5-7-5 English haiku as a derivative of Japanese haiku has its place in the world of poetry, just as 5-7-5 Chinese haiku is another such derivative, seemingly containing about three times as much information as a Japanese haiku.

Today, many bilingual poets and translators in the mainstream North American haiku scene agree that something in the vicinity of 11 English syllables is a suitable approximation of 17 Japanese syllables, in order to convey about the same amount of information as well as the brevity and the fragmented quality found in Japanese haiku. As to the form, some American poets advocate writing in 3-5-3 syllables or 2-3-2 accented beats. While rigid structuring can be accomplished in 5-7-5 haiku with relative ease due to a greater degree of freedom provided by the extra syllables, such structuring in shorter haiku will have the effect of imposing much more stringent rules on English haiku than on Japanese haiku, thereby severely limiting its potential.

Thus "holy 17" can't be saved so formally. When poets write or translate haiku into their language they try to save haiku spirit, and somehow imitate the Japanese form (the length of the lines, the breaks) - but at the same time they take into account the common patterns of their own language so that it sounds natural. This way most of Russian translations of classic Japanese haiku have about 20 syllables; on the other hand, a haiku in English, according to W.Higginson's *The Haiku Handbook*, "is better when it's about 12 syllables with variable line lengths".

Thus many authors prefer to use an unstructured approach to haiku form, taking 17 syllables as a sort of maximum-length guideline. Other authors have attempted to define an alternative form, which would more closely approximate the length of a Japanese haiku while demanding the discipline of a set structure. Advocates of this approach often recommend guidelines of 3-5-3 syllables or 2-3-2 accented beats, as closest approximations to that goal. For example:

**autumn rain —  
the weathered tire swing  
overflows**

A.C.Missias

Languages differ. Japanese and English are very different. Because of the difference in the English language, in order to achieve the highest quality haiku, flexibility in the 5-7-5 syllable pattern is allowed. It is typically required that the poem should be three lines with the middle line longer and totaling no more than 17 syllables.

For example, if haiku is written in a combination like 4-6-4 or 3-5-4 instead of a 5-7-5 haiku, and it is felt that adding extra syllables or words detracts from the poem, it is better not to change it. Haiku poets try to avoid unneeded words. In this haiku,

**A cold winter wind the  
rolling hills of night  
frosty in starlight**

a Japanese haiku poet would say that the poem does not need words like 'cold' or 'frosty' for temperature. A winter wind is already cold. In fact, this haiku example tells us 'it is cold three times ('cold', 'winter', 'frosty') and tells us it is night twice ('night', 'starlight'). Watch what happens when we keep only the words that appeal most to the senses, and rewrite like this:

**a frosty wind the  
hills roll away  
under starlight**

This is much better haiku, even though it is not in the 5-7-5 pattern.

### **KIREJI AS A CUTTING WORD OF HAIKU**

*Kireji* is a special word in Japanese that indicates the pause, the end of the clause. It's not translated into English, but can be imitated with punctuation ("..."/"—"/":"/"!") or with proper line breaks (usually *kireji* splits haiku into two parts, the pause occurs at the end of the first or the second line). Here are some examples:

**Oh, a cuckoo!  
how far should I walk  
until I meet somebody**

Aro Usuda

**When worn out  
And seeking an inn:  
Wisteria flowers!**

Basho

*Kireji* has been used as a vital technique since the Edo period in haiku. One can see that it was skillfully used in the classic pieces of contemporary haiku.

### **KIGO AS A SEASON WORD OF HAIKU**

Traditionally haiku makes use of a seasonal setting word or phrase, which serves as a shorthand for a range of emotional connotations. Most haiku contain a special season word: it introduces a certain background in which "a haiku event" takes place. *Kigo* can express the season directly or through implication. For example, many Japanese haiku refer to cherry blossoms, which are a sign of spring. *Kigo* in English-language American haiku might include the start of Daylight Saving Time (for spring), school letting out (summer), football season (fall), and Christmas (winter). "Spring rain" might be cleansing, while "autumn rain" is more nostalgic or grim; "hot nights" conjures the agitation of summer, while "bare branches" may give a feeling of

loneliness to a winter scene. Such seasonal elements are considered critical in the writing of Japanese haiku, a defining feature. In English, too they are a desirable way to convey a lot of meaning in a few words, e.g.:

**spring morning —  
a goose feather floats  
in the quiet room**

Bruce Ross

**his side of it.  
her side of it.**

**winter silence**

Lee Gurga

**under the desk light  
the buzz of a sprinning moth  
on a half-empty page**

Ron Hahn

Here "moth" says it's supposed to be summer. Winter can be implied under "icicle" or "scarf". Sometimes it's rather difficult to understand what season is meant in haiku; especially when the word is associated with some old tradition. For example:

**Year after year  
on the monkey's face  
a monkey face**

Basho

At first sight, it looks like an aphorism rather than "a moment of life". However, if the translator knew about the tradition connected to this image (the tradition in old Japan to entertain people on the New Year Day, putting a monkey mask on the face of a real monkey and walking around with this monkey) he'd understand what day of the year is meant; and the first line would probably read "this year again..." (speaking of a particular holiday) instead of general "year after year...".

Most though not all haiku reflect nature or one of the four seasons. Although not applicable to haiku in English or any language other than Japanese, it is interesting to



note that in Japan, nature is so much a part of haiku that there are over 6,000 Japanese season words used in haiku. These words may actually name the season directly, such as 'spring day'; they may be a temperature word, such as 'cold wind', or they may be a word, which is particularly identified with a particular season. For example, we especially notice the sound of a frog in the spring because we take it as a sign of spring. In Japan, any haiku containing the word frog is automatically recognized as being about an experience of spring. For example:

**Green frog,  
is your body also  
freshly painted?**

Akutagawa Ryunosuke

The Japanese inclination towards season words, including words indicating small animals and plants, came from animism: respecting spirits in not only human beings and animals, but also other elemental forms like rocks, water, fire, air, and the sun. Respecting and appreciating everything existing in nature have strongly and naturally endured in the Japanese' consciousness of the 20th century.

Of course all living things including animals, plants, and things in nature are not necessarily associated with seasons. Rather, some poets find intrinsic values and universality in them. However, most Western cultures do not have the wealth of seasonal references that are commonly recognizable in Japan, where every insect and animal is assigned a typical seasonal association. Thus, judgment of English-language haiku often makes allowance for other elements that may play a comparable role in setting context or evoking connotations.

### **HUMOR IN HAIKU**

*Senryu* is a close cousin to the haiku, which has many of the same goals, but deals humorously or even sarcastically with 'human nature', and does not require a reference to nature or seasonal reference. In point of fact, the lines between *senryu* and haiku are consistently blurred, and most scholars and poets do not consider one form higher than the other. Here is the example of *senryu*:

**fleas in my hut -  
it's my fault  
you look so skinny**

Issa

Humor in senryu may be called "destructive": it points out some absurd, negative phenomena, and these puns (or even anecdotes, aphorisms) lead to ironic, even sarcastic smirk. On the other hand, humor in haiku is non-negative. The haiku humor is close to "zero-emotion" level; it's an invisible smile of a sage who sees some hidden connection between things (spontaneous Harmony). This state of awareness, like nature itself, is neither positive nor negative. But the moment of catching of this hidden gem results in a gentle, may be a bit sad, smile. Other differences between haiku and senryu are connected to these different kinds of smiles: senryu lack season words, they are often written on current affairs (where is the absurd if not in everyday changes of our life). On the other hand, haiku talks about more durable things and are understood in different countries and different times, showing the eternal laws of the Universe: frogs jump and snails climb despite all the wars, earthquakes and total computerization. Sometimes it's not easy to tell what kind of joke is implied in a poem (and to tell haiku from senryu), because our perception of the world is not so "binary" and differs from person to person, e.g.:

**country of lawnmowers,  
did you leave any  
leaves of grass for me?**

**on the grass cutter's shoes  
plantain seeds –  
bon voyage!**

Two kinds of humor in the examples above are on the same there, however, the first one makes a pun (referring to Whitman's famous poem); the second one is warmer.

### **CAPITALIZATION AND PUNCTUATION**

There is no firm rule regarding capitalization and punctuation in English haiku, nor as to whether the haiku comprises a complete sentence. The same applies to the physical arrangement of the poem. The poets on a poem-by-poem basis usually decide these things. The following samples provide excellent examples of the content and spirit of haiku:

**The breeze brought it —  
a moment of moonlight  
to the hidden fern.**

Foster Jewell

**After I step  
through the moonbeam —  
I do it again.**

George Swede

### **HAIKU VISUAL EFFECTS AND MINIMALISM**

Sometimes poets use some unique format for placing their poems on paper. It's not odd for haiku, too. Real Japanese haiku are written in Japanese characters. Each character — word is also a little picture; seeing "how-it-looks" is apart of "how-it-reads"; special calligraphy may be used to make characters look more impressive:

**left upper corner of the envelope  
the only part of your long letter left**

Alexey Andreev

**moth the world of around  
goes lamp**

Orekhovaya Sonya

Haiku is short, and sometimes people make it as short as possible. In such cases, there is a danger of misunderstanding and ambiguity, as the poem looks too abstract. For example:

**moon**

**wink**

Alexey Andreyev

**neon**

**howl**

Kent Dorsey

The above mentioned example is with a reply. Having the reply is very important here: it means this minimalist's haiku is still understandable.

### **CULTURAL REFERENCES AND RHYMES**

Classic haiku often refer to some well-known elements of national culture. In this case, a word or two can provide some sort of unseen context, which helps to fulfill one of the main requirements for good haiku: it should say a lot in just a few words. Among common allusions of this kind we can find: quotations from older poems and songs; names of places, rivers, etc - they may bear some extra meaning in their literal translation (Ausaka - "Mount of Meetings") or in the images associated with the place (Florida - warm place, ocean, beaches); names of clothes, dishes, plants; elements of myths, rites. For example:

**Winter. On my wall  
Hokusai's "Great Wave"  
hangs Motionless**

Alexey Andreyev

Classic haiku do not rhyme. However, rhymed haiku poems are possible. Some modern poets tend to claim that rhymes (pace, alliteration, etc.) are "unnatural". For example:

**Wolfs howl -  
fat and lazy by the fire  
lap dog growls in reply**

David McMurray

**night rain -  
some lights far away,  
some drops on the pane**

Alexey Andreyev

**always the wind  
only sometimes the chime**

Laura Young

Poetry is honesty with a fluent language; good eyesight plus a good-working tongue. And even rhymed haiku will be “haiku plus something”, not “haiku minus something”.

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