

Haiku as a form of personal reflection: A practical guideline for writing haiku in the Japanese EFL reading class

「振り返り」としての俳句活用法：英語読解クラスでの実践的アプローチ

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About

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the use of haiku as a form of personal reflection on English language learning. It starts with the review of some issues of Extensive Reading (ER) in L2 contexts and explores how to integrate haiku writing into an extensive reading activity. It also provides a step-by-step procedure for writing haiku as a reflection on an ER book.

要約: 本稿の目的は、英語学習における「振り返り」としての俳句活用法を考察することである。本稿では、多読活動での問題点に触れながら、英語読解クラスでの俳句活用法を議論し、俳句作成ための実践的なアプローチを提案する。

One of the problems with English reading courses in Japan is the teaching / learning style of English as a foreign language. Teachers are dependent on the grammar-translation method in the classroom and students make a special emphasis on input (e.g., the memorization of lexical items) in their language learning. For that reason, students have little opportunity to write and speak practical English. To make matters worse, very few students study the notion of voice at the secondary level: what voice is; how it is expressed in the text; and why it is important. It means that Japanese students, in general, are not properly taught to express their voices in English. In this context, it is necessary to discuss how teachers can incorporate a writing task as a way to express voices into the reading classroom.

This article aims to expand the discussion of a reading-writing connection in L2 contexts. It will address some issues of Extensive Reading (ER) and provide a practical guideline for teaching haiku composition as a form of personal reflection in the reading class.

Issues of extensive reading in L2 contexts

Many teachers and researchers believe that ER is a useful language activity in second language (L2) education. Previous studies have indicated that ER has a positive impact on reading comprehension, the increase in reading speed, and the acquisition of the lexical and structural knowledge of the target language (Yamashita, 2008).

When teachers incorporate ER into the reading class, they are faced with certain issues. One issue is how to set a goal of an ER activity. A principal concern is exactly how many words students need to read during a semester in order to improve their reading skills. The second and foremost issue is that of credibility. Language teachers may wonder if students really read books. Some teachers use a Moodle Modular Quiz to gain credibility; others have students write a book report or keep a book journal. These follow-up activities are important, but they go against the philosophy of ER, which is "reading for pleasure". These activities provide students with little opportunity to produce their own ideas or opinions on the content of a book. Of particular importance in reading class is getting the students to understand the content, reflect on the story, and produce their own voice.

The use of Japanese poetry can help solve this issue. According to Iida (2010, 2012a), haiku - a short, three line Japanese poem with a specific number of syllables in each line, consists of the writer's voice reflecting on

both internal and external worlds of the individual. Haiku is based on the writer's reflection on his or her real-life experience. In this sense, the application of this concept into the EFL classroom will provide students with the possibility to expand their use of literary genres in L2 development and more importantly, to construct a new pedagogical approach for making reading-writing connections in English language learning.

Teaching haiku writing in the reading class

Various approaches for teaching the writing of haiku are applicable in class. Some students may have difficulty in composing haiku (Iida 2012b) and it may take time to finish writing their first one. The instructor should simplify the writing process as much as possible. It is important to show students how to write and to explicitly teach them the skill in class. This section describes a practical guideline for writing haiku as a form of reflection on the story of ER books by modifying Iida's (2010) social-expressivist framework for teaching haiku composition.

Reading an ER book

Students choose and read one ER book. The aim of this activity is to read for pleasure. Students choose a book they can read without having to use a dictionary. When the students often look up words in a dictionary in the reading process, the instructor may ask them to change the book and choose an easier one. This follows Nation's instructions on how to choose an ER book (Nation, 2008).

Reviewing the concept of haiku

A composing haiku exercise starts with a review of the textual and structural features of haiku. The instructor explains that haiku is not a simple sketch of writers' observations but rather their direct, personal responses to their experiences. Students must understand the main purpose of the activity, which is to develop their own voice on the basis of their experience of reading ER books.

Collecting material for haiku

Each of the students chooses one particular scene from their ER book. Some students may choose the most impressive scene; others may choose the climax of the story. Then they describe it in their own words. It is important to describe the detail of the scene by answering the following questions:

- Who are the characters?
- What is happening?
- What is your impression of the scene?

Composing a haiku

Students use their description to compose the first haiku. Although they have a lot of information from the previous activity, students may still have no idea about how to start the haiku. The instructor gets students to consider what they really want to say. Students sit in groups to help each other arrive at the most suitable expressions to write their feeling toward the scene. Adjustment to the haiku structure requires students to come up with similar vocabulary options to fit into the 5-7-5 syllable pattern. The instructor can help here by encouraging them to search for synonyms, a technique commonly used for producing haiku.

Peer-review

Peer reading is effective because it provides students with an opportunity to understand how an audience interprets and reacts to their voice. After students divide into groups, each student reads his or her haiku aloud twice, while their group members note their interpretations of the haiku. Next, they explain why they feel one way or the other about the haiku. The writer of the haiku then reveals what he or she wanted to express in the poem. In this way, each student has a chance to understand the difference between his or her intentions and the readers' interpretations. It is important to discuss in groups what changes each writer needs to make in order to accurately convey their voices.

Revising the haiku

Students revise their haiku based on the feedback they received in the peer review. The instructor asks students to confirm that the revised poem follows the haiku structure and more importantly, whether it reflects the writer's individual impression of the story of an ER book.

Implications

This article demonstrated the use of haiku as a form of personal reflection in the reading class. Language teachers know that reading is an important skill for students to learn to use the target language, but they should become more aware of the teaching for developing productive skills. From the aspect of written communication, reading and writing are inseparable skills. It is therefore crucial to reconsider how language teachers can make reading-writing connections in their English class.

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