

The Use of Haiku in Teaching English (2)

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1. Introduction

English learners in Japan often mention that when they write English, they depend on their first language, Japanese, and translate Japanese words, phrases, and organization into English. This often blocks the flow of English writing and frustrates the learners and the teachers of English. This may reside in the stylistic differences in writing strategies between Japanese and English. In either deductive or inductive organization, the writers of English build up their arguments with logical coherence. On the other hand, Japanese writing depends more on readers' interpretation with respect to coherence (Hinds, 1987; see also Connor, 1996). According to Hinds, English writing demands transitional statements which may be sometimes lacking in Japanese (p. 146). This reflects the writing style of haiku in Japanese. The writer may simply describe the visual image as it is with condensed words using 17 Japanese letters. This subjective description demands the reader to see the event from the writer's point of view (Morita, 1998). In contrast, the writer of English is expected to develop the arguments in logical order such as building each block one by one by using transitional statements.

Contrastive writing styles first appeared in 1966 with Kaplan's article. He compared paragraph development in expository essays written by the six cultural different groups of people. He discusses that essays written in English follow a linear development while ones written

in Oriental languages use an indirect approach (Kaplan, 1966).

In a recent article on contrastive rhetoric, Hinds (1987) argues about the distribution of responsibility between readers and writers; that is, the amount of expectation the writer demands from the reader. If there is a breakdown in communication in English, it is because the writer has not been clear enough in his/her writing. On the other hand, if the same thing happens in Japanese, for instance, it is because the reader has not exerted him/herself enough to understand (p. 143). Hinds analyses the distribution of the Japanese postpositional particle, *wa* as the marker showing an old information in the expository writing (pp. 147-149), and illustrates how much Japanese writing demands on readers to understand. He concludes that Japanese is a reader-responsible language, while English is a writer-responsible language.

This paper investigates strategies of translation from Japanese, the learner's first language, into English by using haiku poetry as a teaching material. Its focal point is how the learner perceives the process of translation when he/she writes a haiku poem in English.

Haiku is a form of poetry that Japanese people have practiced for centuries. It expresses nature in each season as its theme, reflecting a flame of the Japanese mind in everyday life. It is considered as the shortest poem in the world. With only 17 Japanese letters, the writer is expected to describe what he/she sees and feels. There is not much explanation on the background of the poem. The reader is demanded to fill the gaps caused by omission with his/her own experiences and interpretations. In Japan haiku is usually introduced in elementary school, so most people in Japan know how to create a haiku poem. Takai (2001, 2002) discusses the importance of using students' own culture in learning a foreign language, and examines how haiku can be incorporated into the

syllabus of teaching English as a foreign language in Japan.

2. Research questions and hypotheses to be tested

The following research questions were formulated to investigate strategies of translation from Japanese into English:

- (1) Does translation of Japanese haiku into English motivate Japanese students to write English?
- (2) In learning English, do Japanese students always use translation strategies when writing haiku in English since haiku is regarded as a part of their own culture and constructs their way of thinking?

In discussing translation, we cannot avoid claiming that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity has become a basic concept to contrastive rhetoric (Connor, 1996). Different languages affect perception and thought of the people. According to Connor (2001), this weak version rather than the strong version (that is, that language controls perception and thought) has regained the interests among studies in culture. If it is true that languages affect perception and thought of the people who use them, Japanese language structure will affect the learner's translation of haiku from Japanese into English. On the other hand, the learner could avoid this interference from Japanese language structure if he/she writes haiku without using the translation strategy. Based upon these arguments, the hypotheses to be tested in this research are as follows:

1. Students feel it difficult to translate into English from Japanese haiku.
2. Students feel it much easier to make English haiku without translating Japanese haiku into English.
3. Students become to write English without depending on translation

from Japanese.

3. Method

The participants of this study were 74 Japanese university students in two second year English classes, in which one class was offered in the day time, and another in the evening time program. There were 36 students in the day time, and 38 in the evening time program.

About one third of the class time was used for teaching haiku in each class session for four months of the one year English course in 2002. The teaching procedures were as follows.

First, students were introduced to why haiku was being used for the teaching material in learning English. Students were asked how much they knew about haiku and whether they had made a haiku poem before. Thus, the basic information on haiku was introduced and reviewed through discussion of haiku in Japanese.

Second, students were asked to compare a Japanese haiku poem to an English poem in their styles and techniques. Since the topics of the poems are similar: both relating to a flower, the following poems were compared:

When I look carefully
 I see the nazuna blooming
 By the Hedge!
 (*Yoku mireba*
Nazuna hana saku
Kakine kana)

Basho (1644-94)

Flower in the crannied wall,
 I pluck you out of the crannies; ...
 Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
 Little flower ... but if I could understand
 What you are, root and all in all,
 I should know what God and man is.

Tennyson (1890-92)*

Third, traditional Japanese haiku poems were introduced and discussed. Students were asked to try to translate them into English and to compare them with the given model translations. Students were encouraged to make their own haiku using the model translations for reference. Here are some haiku poems used in class:

Furuike ya

Kawazu tobikomu

Mizu no oto

(Basho)

Old pond...

A frog leaps in

Water's sound

(translated by W. J. Higginson)

Kare eda ni

Karasu tomari keri

Aki no kure

(Basho)

On a barren branch

A raven has perched—

Autumn dusk

(translated by W.J. Higginson)

Shizukesa ya

Iwa ni shimiuru

Semi no koe

(Basho)

The stillness—

Soaking into stones

Cicada's cry

(translated by W.J. Higginson)

Fourth, students were asked to make their own creative haiku using three lines, but were not so strictly asked to limit 17 syllables or to include a word describing the season. Here are some examples of their products:

After the rain

A spider web without its master

Shining in the sun

The sun

Giving out the brilliant light

In the freezing cold

In the clear morning

The ground makes sounds

As I walk...

Small Christmas tree
Excites little boy's curiosity
By its holy magic

Finally, in the end of the course, students were asked about their writing strategies including translation strategies in the questionnaires (see Appendix). They were asked to rate 1 as being the least agreeable and 5 as being the most agreeable.

4. Results

Table 1 shows the results of the questionnaire regarding students' perception on writing and translating from Japanese into English in haiku lessons. In the questionnaire, questions of Q1, Q2, Q6 and Q9 are asking about the learners' perception on using the translation strategy, while questions of Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8 and Q10 are related to the one on using without the translation strategy. In Q1, students were asked whether translation from Japanese haiku into English was easy or not. If they chose "strongly agree," it showed that the translation task did not bother them. In Q2, students were asked whether the translation strategy helped them write English haiku. In Q6, students were asked whether they liked to use the translation strategy from Japanese into English. If they evaluate translation highly, they would agree strongly to the statement. In Q9, students were asked to evaluate the translation strategy whether it was helpful or not. Therefore, Q1, Q2, Q6 and Q9 are categorized into the one group where students are using the translation strategy to write English haiku in Table 2.

In Q3 and Q4, on the other hand, students were asked how impor-

tant it was for getting a clear image of haiku poems in translation. The focus is on the image students would get from a haiku poem, and not so much on the language. Therefore, this item is categorized into using “without translation” in writing haiku in Table 2. In Q5, Q8 and Q10, students were asked whether they could write haiku in English without using the translation strategy. In Q7, students were asked whether they liked to make haiku in English without using the translation strategy. In Table 2, they are categorized in one group where students write English haiku without translating from Japanese.

Table 2 shows the comparison between two groups in numbers of students responded and in percentage for the numbers of students responded: one is writing haiku with the translation strategy from Japanese language, and another without the translation strategy. Figure 1 shows the percentage for the numbers of students in the translation group, while Figure 2 shows the one in the without-translation group.

Table 1 Learners' perception on writing and translation strategies

	Q1.	Q2.	Q3.	Q4.	Q5.	Q6.	Q7.	Q8.	Q9.	Q10.
1 Strongly disagree	13	7	0	4	24	16	12	6	9	8
2	24	20	0	10	8	16	9	14	21	8
3	15	22	7	18	12	25	21	15	25	23
4	10	16	10	19	4	12	24	19	15	13
5 Strongly agree	12	9	57	23	26	5	8	20	4	17
Total	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	69

Note. The total number of students in Q10 was 69 since five students didn't respond.

Table 2 Comparison between translation and without translation strategies.

	Translation (Q1, Q2, Q6, Q9)		Without translation (Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q10)	
	1 Strongly disagree	45	15%	54
2	81	28%	49	11%
3	87	29%	96	22%
4	53	18%	89	20%
5 Strongly agree	30	10%	151	35%
Total	296	100%	439	100%

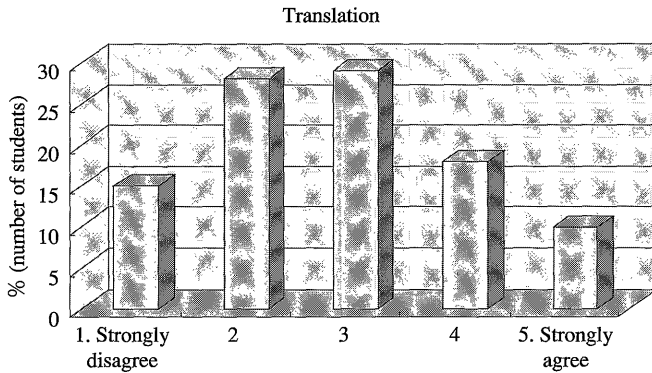


Figure 1 Translation with a percentage of numbers of students

5. Analysis and discussion

The first hypothesis concerning students' perception on translation from Japanese haiku was supported by the results of the questionnaire. In Q1 of the questionnaire, fifty percent of the students (which combines the number of students who chose 1 showing “strongly disagree” with the one who chose 2, next to “strongly disagree”) felt it difficult to translate

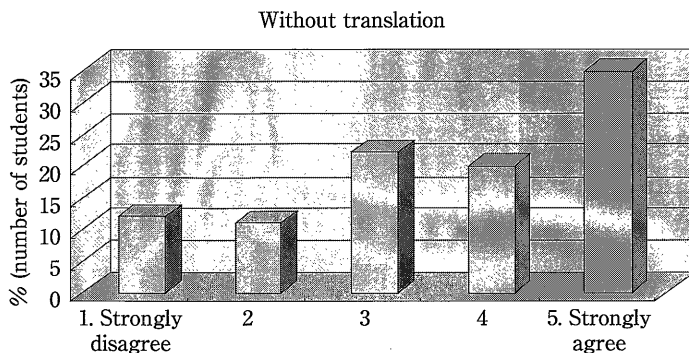


Figure 2 Without translation with a percentage of numbers of students

Japanese haiku into English while only less than 30 percent of them (which combines the number of students who chose 5 showing “strongly agree” with the one who chose 4, next to “strongly agree”) felt it not so difficult to translate (see Table 1).

Haiku poetry is within the Japanese cultural frame so that students may feel it easier to make haiku in English than to make an English poem. However, most students feel difficulty in translating from Japanese haiku into English. This may be considered that the students’ level of Japanese language is far more complex than their level of English language. Therefore the complexity of Japanese language hinders them in translating from Japanese haiku into English.

The second hypothesis stating that students feel it much easier to make English haiku without the translation strategy was also supported by the results of the questionnaire. There may be many reasons why students feel it easier to make English haiku without translating from Japanese, but one thing we can assume is that students can focus on the image for haiku and use plain English at their own level of grammar and

vocabulary.

Japanese haiku made by some famous haiku poets are sometimes written in sophisticated language. For example, in the Basho's haiku, "*Kare eda ni, Karasu tomari keri, Aki no kure* (on a barren branch, a raven has perched..., autumn dusk)," students may find it difficult to translate *Karasu tomari keri* into English since the choice of tense in English is different from Japanese and the verb, *tomaru* in Japanese has at least three different synonyms: stop, sit, and stay. Without translating directly from the Japanese poem, students may avoid complex grammatical structures and vocabulary and use as plain English as they know at their level of the language. This follows one of the Krashen's language acquisition hypotheses (Krashen, 1985): the learner will acquire the language with a natural order so that if he/she is not ready for the complexity of the structure he/she faces, he/she may avoid or not comprehend it.

The third hypothesis concerning students' perception on writing English without using the translation strategy was also supported by the results of the questionnaire. The results show that about a half of the students (43% of the students) write English without translating from Japanese (see Table 1). They don't have to make out a first draft of Japanese before writing English. It is possible to say, therefore, that writing haiku in English helps students write English without translating from Japanese. However, the results also show that twenty three percent of the students still depend on Japanese before writing English.

6. Conclusion

Haiku is a form of poetry which has reflected Japanese culture in everyday life. People are attracted by the simplicity and harmonious

rhythm which corresponds to ways of thinking among Japanese. It is considered advantage for the learners to learn English within their own cultural framework (see Takai, 2001, 2002). Since the topics may be within the realm of their own culture, students can activate their background knowledge to make English haiku.

Students, however, feel it uneasy to translate from Japanese haiku written by somebody else into English. They feel it much easier to make English haiku out of the image they can get in daily life bypassing Japanese language help. This may enhance their strategy to think in English and write English without a need of preparing a first draft in Japanese.

One of the important challenges in teaching a foreign language is how to help students become thinking and writing in the target language without a route of translation from their first language. The use of haiku in teaching English is one of the ways to help students acquire the strategy to write English without direct translation from their first language, Japanese.

Note:

* These poems were cited from the hand-out, “East and West Comparison Through the Poems” at the workshop, “Japanese Mindscapes and Patterns of Communication” conducted by Muneo Yoshikawa in the 2000 intercultural communication summer seminar at Pacific University in Oregon, sponsored by the Intercultural Communication Institute.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Use the mark card to respond to the following statements. Mark 1 if you strongly disagree to the statement. Mark 5 if you strongly agree to the statement.

- Q1. I didn't feel much difficulty to translate Japanese haiku into English.
- Q2. Translation from Japanese into English helps when writing English haiku.
- Q3. When translating from Japanese into English, getting clear image of the haiku is the most important.
- Q4. When making English haiku, I made it out of the haiku's image.
- Q5. When making English haiku, I didn't have to translate from Japanese.
- Q6. It is fun to translate from Japanese haiku into English.
- Q7. It is fun to make English haiku.
- Q8. I have realized that we can write haiku in English.
- Q9. Through the exercises in translation and making English haiku, I have become to feel easier to write English.
- Q10. Now, I can write English without translating from Japanese.