

## Student Poetry Activities and Reflective-Writing Exercises

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### 詩を利用した英語学習と学生の英語表現力との関係について

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#### 要 旨

本論文は、英語コミュニケーションの受講生がインターネットを検索し、関心のある詩を見つけ、それに基づいて、英語の練習問題を作り、授業中にクラスメートと交換する学習方法について報告するものである。最初に、学生に1) 古典的な名作として知られている英詩、2) 和歌や俳句や小倉百人一首等の日本の伝統的な詩の英訳、3) ユーモラスな詩、という三種類の詩から一種類を選択させた。次いで、1) 文章の組み換え、2) 穴埋め、3) 整序という三種類の問題から一種類を選択させた。そして最後に、学生が作った練習問題、クラスメートの回答、及びこの授業についての学生達の感想を紹介した。その結果、詩を利用したこのような学習法は、学生に自分が選択した詩のテーマについて熟考させたり、詩と自分の経験との関連性について思考させる効果をもたらすことが確認された。

Key Words : Haiku, Waka, Ogura Hyakunin Isshu, Text-Recombining Exercise, Jumbled-Order Exercise, Humor, Reflective-Writing

#### 1. Introduction

This article looks at a poetry reading and reflective-writing exercise conducted in the first year English Communication I classes in which students were required to visit the internet outside of class and select a poem they liked from a group of online poetry sites. They then prepared a set of questions based on their poem and gave them to three classmates. The aim of the activity was (1) to encourage students to use the internet as a resource for accessing interesting samples of a variety of English texts. (2) to raise student-awareness of linguistic features such as rhyming, alliteration and discourse markers; and (3) to

encourage students to engage in reflective writing concerning themes in their poems and how the poems reflected their own personal experience. The article will look at samples of student-created poetry activities, accuracy of classmate responses to their partners' activities, and students' reflective writing comments.

#### 2. Poetry Options

The author's homepage contains links to all of the recommended poetry sites. The students were given three types of poems to choose from when making their activities: *world's greatest English language*

poems, Japanese poems with English translations, and funny poems. The range of sites recommended for the (1) **world's greatest poems**, included the following: a list of 50 popular poems voted on by internet visitors to the site which included such famous poems as "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost, "There Is Another Sky" by Emily Dickinson, and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by William Wordsworth, but also such lesser-known poems as Ogden Nash's "A Word To Husbands," "If You Forget Me" by Pablo Neruda and "As Soon as Fred Gets Out of Bed" by Jack Prelutsky; a site which allows users to search poems by topic, for example, "autumn poems," "courage poems," "childhood poems," and so on; and a site on "popular poems for students," including well-known poems such as "Do not go gentle into that good night," by Dylan Thomas, "Because I could not stop for death" by Emily Dickinson, and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes. (2) **Japanese Poems in English Translation**: These included a site established by the University of Virginia in the United States which compiles all of the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* (小倉百人一首), or *100 Poems by 100 Poets*. In this site the poems are presented in parallel format with the first original Japanese kanji character versions, alongside an English phonetically spelled version of the original Japanese and then the poems in English translation. Each of the three formats allows users to page up or down independent of the other two, while also allowing them to line up all three versions alongside each other for comparison. Also included in the selection of Japanese poetry with English translation sites is the *Man'yoshu Best 100* (万葉集ベスト100) which contains not only all of the poems but extensive annotations about references contained in the poems. The recommended sites for Japanese poems also includes a site on haiku (俳句) called *10 haikuists and their works from Basho to Koi*, a site on waka (和歌) including the *kokinshu*, and a site focused on the haiku of Kobayashi Issa (小林一茶). (3) **Funny Poems**, which is a site designed for junior-high school students in English-speaking countries with

themes centering around school life and containing topics such as "homework poems," "excuses poems," "classroom zoo poems" and other such humorous topics.

### 3. Choices for Design of Student-Generated Activities

Students were required to create a reading and comprehension activity based on their poems to give to a partner in class. There were three options as to activity-design that students could choose from. The first option was **fill-in-the-blanks-activity**, in which a number of words in the poem were left blank and the missing words written in jumbled order at the bottom of the poem. The partner was then required to match the appropriate word with each blank.

### 4. Student 1 Activity

The first student's activity was based upon the poem "The Sentence" by Russian poet Anna Akhmatova. The poem activity type the student prepared was a decoupling activity in which the student divided sentences from the original poem in half and arrayed the first half on the left side of the page and the latter in random order on the right side and the partner taking the quiz had to recombine the sentences. The original poem and the student activity is shown in figure 1:

Figure 1: Student 1 Poem and Activity

Original Poem
<p>The Echo  <i>Anna Akhmatova</i></p>
<p>Long ago were paths to the past closed,                      And what shall I do with the past, at all?                      What is there?                      Just washed with blood flat stones,                      Or the door, immured in a wall.                      Or the echo, that all time me worries,                      Tho' I pray it to be silent, hard...                      To this echo happened the same story,                      That – to one, I bear in my heart.</p>

Student-Generated Activity	
Match the sentence-beginnings on the left with the endings on the right:	
1. Long ago were paths	a. that all the time me worries
2. And what shall I do	b. it to be silent, hard
3. What is there?	c. with the past, at all?
4. Or the echo	d. Just washed with blood flat stones
5. Though I pray	e. to the past closed

**5. Classmate Responses**

This student gave her activity to three classmates to work in class. The first classmate’s answers were “Long ago were paths Just washed with blood flat stones,” “And what shall I do with the past, at all?,” “Or the echo that all the time me worries,” “Though I pray it to be silent, hard” and “What is there? to the past closed.” As a result, this first classmate got 60% of the matchings correct. The second classmate’s answers were “Long ago were paths to the past closed,” “And what shall I do with the past at all?” “What is there? that all the time me worries,” “Or the echo Just washed with blood flat stones,” and “Though I pray it to be silent, hard.” As a result this second classmate also got 60% of the matchings correct. The third classmate’s answers were “Long ago were paths to the past closed,” “And what shall I do with the past, at all?” “What is there? Just washed with blood flat stones,” “Or the echo, that all time me worries,” and “Tho’ I pray it to be silent, hard.” As a result, this third classmate got 100% of the matchings correct. The student who selected this poem and prepared the activity wrote the following reflective comments:

Figure 2: Student 1 Reflective Writing Comments

I choose this poem because author feels something she wants to forget her past. I can understand her feeling. I also think I try to forget some bad memory my past. The past in this poem is different idea, for example, “path to the past closed.” This means she want to go back to past. I think why she does, maybe that’s she wants to change some mistake. But she can’t go back, so it’s sad feeling. Also past is an echo. She doesn’t want to remember some bad thing, so she pray it to be silent hard, but it all the time worries, so it’s hard for her I think. I also have some memories I want to forget. I read this parts, I feel sympathy. I thought there was a person thought like my thinking. The memories are very scary also I think because she says “washed with blood flat stone.” It’s very violence.

**6. Student 2 Activity**

The second student’s activity was based on English Romantic poet Christina Rossetti’s poem “Remember.” The poem activity type the student prepared was a fill-in-the-blank activity in which the student left four of the fifteen lines in the poem blank and then arrayed the missing lines at the bottom of the page in random order. The partner taking the quiz had to match the line corresponding with each blank in the text. The original poem and the student activity is shown in figure 3:

Figure 3: Student 2 Poem and Activity

Original Poem
Remember <i>Christina Rosetti</i>
Remember me when I am gone away, Gone far away into the silent land; When you can no more hold me by the hand, Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay. Remember me when no more day by day You tell me of our future that you plann'd: Only remember me; you understand It will be late to counsel then or pray. Yet if you should forget me for a while And afterwards remember, do not grieve: For if the darkness and corruption leave A vestige of the thoughts that once I had, Better by far you should forget and smile Than that you should remember and be sad.

Student-Generated Activity
Remember me when I am gone away, [                    ①                    ]
When you can no more hold me by the hand, [                    ②                    ]
Remember me when no more day by day You tell me of our future that you plann'd: Only remember me; you understand It will be late to counsel then or pray. Yet if you should forget me for a while [                    ③                    ]
For if the darkness and corruption leave A vestige of the thoughts that once I had, Better by far you should forget and smile [                    ④                    ].
Fill in the blanks with the sentences: ● Than that you should remember and be sad. ● Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay. ● Gone far away into the silent land; ● And afterwards remember, do not grieve:

### 7. Classmate Responses

This student gave her activity to three classmates to work in class. The first classmate's answers for each of the numbered blanks were as follows: for ① the classmate chose "Gone far away into the silent land," for ② the classmate chose "And afterwards remember, do not grieve," for ③ the classmate chose "Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay," and for ④ the student chose "Than that you should remember and be sad." Of these answers, ① and ④ were correct and ② and ③ were incorrect, so this classmate had a 50% score on the activity. The second classmate gave the following answers for each of the numbered blanks: for ① the classmate chose "Gone far away into the silent land," for ② the classmate chose "Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay," for ③ the classmate chose "And afterwards remember, do not grieve," and for ④ the student chose "Than that you should remember and be sad." Of these answers, all four were correct, so this classmate had a 100% score on the activity. The third classmate gave the

following answers for each of the numbered blanks: for ① the classmate chose "Gone far away into the silent land," for ② the classmate chose "And afterwards remember, do not grieve," for ③ the classmate chose "Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay," and for ④ the student chose "Than that you should remember and be sad." Of these answers, ① and ④ were correct and ② and ③ were incorrect, so this classmate had a 50% score on the activity. The student who selected this poem and prepared the activity wrote the following reflective comments:

Figure 4: Student 2 Reflective Writing Comments

I like this poem because it's very kind and warm, but also sad. I think that "I am gone away" means death. However, this line doesn't say it directly. It's very poet. I feel painful heart from this line so I like this line. I also like "And afterwards remember, do not grieve." His conflicting feelings appear to this line. I want you to remember, but I don't want you feel sad. She is gentle, and she is lonely. Therefore I like it. "Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay" is interesting. She feels conflicting heart, and she can't decide. Her body turns, but still she stays. She knows she have to go, but her heart want stay. "The silent land" I think it means heaven.

### 8. Student 3 Poetry Activity

The third student chose a poem originally in Japanese from the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu or 100 Poems by 100 Poets. The poem was by The Monk Sosei (素性法師) and is number 21 in the 100 poems. The student created a jumbled sequence activity based on this poem, with the full original Japanese poem given as a support and the English translated lines in mixed order. The student then gave the activity to three of his classmates to do and the classmates had to put the English translated lines in the proper sequence using the original Japanese text as guidance. The original poem and the student-generated activity is shown in figure 5.

Figure 5: Student Activity from Japanese Poem

Original Poem
<p>素性法師</p> <p>今来むと いひしばかりに 長月の</p> <p>有明の月を 待ち出でつるかな</p>
English Translation
<p>Just because she said, "In a moment I will come," I've awaited her</p> <p>Until the moon of daybreak, In the long month, has appeared.</p>
Student-Generated Activity
<p>Read the Japanese poem, then write the English sentences in right order:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) I've awaited her</li> <li>(2) "In a moment I will come,"</li> <li>(3) In the long month, has appeared.</li> <li>(4) Just because she said,</li> <li>(5) Until the moon of daybreak,</li> </ol>

### 9. Classmate Responses

The student gave the activity to three classmates. The first classmate gave the following sequence as the correct one: "In a moment I will come," "Just because she said,"

"I've awaited her," "Until the moon of daybreak," and "In the long month, has appeared."

Of the five segments, three of the first classmate's were in the correct order so classmate one's score was 60%. The second classmate gave the following sequence as the correct one: "Just because she said," "In a moment I will come," "I've awaited her," "Until the moon of daybreak," and "In the long month, has appeared." Of the five segments, all five of

the second classmate's were in the correct order so classmate one's score was 100%.

The second classmate gave the following sequence as the correct one: "Just because she said," "In a moment I will come," "I've awaited her," "Until the moon of daybreak," and "In the long month, has appeared." Of the five segments, all five of the third classmate's were in the correct order so classmate one's score was 100%. The student who selected this poem and prepared the activity wrote the following reflective comments:

Figure 4: Student 2 Reflective Writing Comments

This poem is very peaceful, so I can feel calmness when I read it. I think the story in the poem is a little sad because the writer is lonely. He waits for his girlfriend but she doesn't come to him soon. I think his heart is not decided what to do. He wants to see her so he thinks maybe he wait, but he feels time keeps passing and he is tired of waiting.

### 10. Discussion

The first student's comments suggest that she had recognized and responded to the author's use of various images to convey different emotions about the past. The student clearly recognized "the echo" as a metaphor for painful memories, and cognitively links this with the other lines "I pray it to be silent, hard" and "all the time me worries," to form an impression of the author's struggle to put the past behind her. The student also responds to the image of the past as "Just washed with blood flat stones," recognizing the violence in the image without speculating as to what kind of experiences could evoke such a disturbing image.

Student 2's reflective comments suggest an strong response and identification with the poem. The student recognizes the central emotion of ambivalence in the struggle to let go of loved ones as death approaches. The student uses the word "conflicting" twice, first in the writer's desire to be remembered by her loved one, and the wish to shield the loved one from the pain of grieving. The student characterizes

the writer as “gentle” but “lonely.” The student also expresses appreciation for the subtlety of the author’s use of “gone away” and “silent country” as metaphors for dying and the afterlife. Finally, the student shows a high awareness of linguistic nuance in her appreciation for the subtlety of the line, “Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay” which she aptly characterizes as knowing she must go even as the heart wants to stay.

The third student’s comments also suggest an identification with the poem. He writes that he can feel the poet’s complicated emotions as he is caught between the desire to see his love and his growing impatience. The student writes of feeling a calmness from the poem which is an intriguing interpretation given the impatience also clearly present in the poem.

## 11. Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the use of online poetry sites to encourage students to explore English poetry, find a particular poem they felt an affinity for, and engage in a reflective-writing exercise. The students were given a set of different options to choose from in order to maximise the success of the activity in engaging students with different tastes and interests. The first set of options concerned the type of poem the students could select including an enduring classic of English poetry, a traditional Japanese poem with an English translation, and a humorous poem. Students were also given a set of options for the kind of activity they would make based on their poem to introduce to a partner including a fill-in-the-blank, text-recombining or jumbled-order activity. The paper presented three samples of student-generated activities, classmate responses and post-activity reflective-writing. The activities and classmate responses presented showed that students did understand their chosen activity format, and that the classmates were able to use context clues in the partner-prepared activity to reconstruct most or all of the original poem accurately. The reflective-writing samples presented showed that the activity was successful in enabling students to find

a poem of interest for them, to analyze the poem to find examples of figurative writing, and to recognize in the poem a relevance for their own experience.

Future research on this topic should look at students’ ability to recognize literary devices such as rhyming, imagery, metaphors and alliteration and should also consider the ability of the students, once having recognized these devices in poems written by others, to produce them in their own writing. Future research should also investigate the efficacy of student-generated poetry and reflective-writing activities in raising students’ awareness of irony and humor in general, including where how those features differ in their own language and English.

## References

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