

Poetry writing as expressive pedagogy in an EFL context: Identifying possible assessment tools for haiku poetry in EFL freshman college writing

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Available online 14 November 2008

Abstract

Japanese poetry, haiku, has been widely accepted in western countries. While previous studies have reported on the applicability of haiku poetry to teaching practices in a variety of contexts, few researchers have discussed assessment which is one of the most important factors in language teaching.

The aim of this study is to produce assessment tools for haiku poetry writing as expressive pedagogy at the tertiary level in an EFL Japanese context. The study first discusses the concept of haiku poetry writing as expressive pedagogy, and then describes what factors need to be assessed in haiku writing in terms of peer assessment and teacher assessment. It lastly demonstrates a rubric which consists of analytic rating scales. This study also provides a model for designing a rubric for assessing haiku poetry in English language teaching.

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Keywords: Haiku poetry; Expressive pedagogy; Assessment tools; Rubrics

1. Introduction

English language teaching in Japan has been changing over the past five years. With the principal goal, set by the Ministry of Education, of ‘fostering Japanese who can use practical English’, the focus has shifted from teaching the grammatical aspects to developing communicative language proficiency. However, there are many teachers who continue to apply the Grammar-Translation Method into their own contexts, due to the fact that grammatical knowledge of English is a key component to passing Japanese university entrance examinations which still remains the primary concern of most teachers and students.

As a result, many college students start with no writing experience in a freshman composition course, and they begin to study the fundamental concepts in written English. The main goal of

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English writing at this level is to encourage students to write academic papers, such as annotated bibliographies and research papers. For that reason, expressive writing has been disregarded in writing courses, and students just keep in mind that it is not allowed to use the first person ‘I’ in all types of English writing. Composition courses are inclined to be considered as places for students to study English rhetoric rather than to develop their voice in writing. Traditionally, ‘accuracy’ is the most important element in writing and students focus on grammatical correctness instead of developing their ideas in English.

In these contexts, the introduction of expressive writing is challenging for the following reasons: universities are situated as places to develop ‘academic’ skills in the society; and the concept of ‘product’ is much more emphasized than that of ‘process’ in writing. College students, in general, are expected to become writers who can generate their ideas and organize their papers in a professional way. However, the fact is that foreign language learners start to have engagement and develop confidence in writing when being able to express themselves using a target language. From this viewpoint, the concept of expressive writing is necessary to develop their writing skills. Here, a fundamental issue arises: how writing teachers can deal with expressive pedagogy in a current school curriculum and how they can assess students’ production using objective stances. This paper will discuss how EFL Japanese teachers can apply the concept of haiku to a freshman college writing course and how they can assess students’ poems.

2. The need for expressive pedagogy

The application of expressive pedagogy is necessary in EFL Japanese contexts, because the main goal of English language teaching issued by the Ministry of Education is to foster Japanese who can use practical English (MEXT, 2002). At the same time, promoting autonomous learners in a given context is a part of the goal. In other words, a challenging point in ELT in these contexts is how EFL Japanese teachers can develop students’ communication skills while encouraging them to be more self-directed.

There are some reasons expressive pedagogy should be applied to freshman college writing in Japanese universities. From the viewpoint of fostering autonomous learners, the application of expressive writing is particularly meaningful. Many students have been taught English on the bases of the Grammar-Translation Method and teacher-centered instruction, and most of them are inclined to be dependent on teachers in their language learning. Expressive pedagogy can allow students to gain a greater awareness of process in writing while providing opportunities to develop the ability to take responsibility for and take control over their writing (Tate, Rupiper, & Schick, 2001).

Along with that, the feature of developing writers’ individual voices in the pedagogy leads to the principal goal in ELT in Japan. Similar to oral discourse involving negotiation of meaning between participants, written communication requires interaction between a writer and reader. Without any ‘voice’, communication rarely happens. From a pragmatic viewpoint, the notion of ‘voice’ is essential for learners to enhance communication skills. The perspective is what Japanese writing teachers must consider, because the fact is that most of the students have no idea regarding how to use what they studied although they learned the grammar rules and the meaning of many phrases using textbooks in schools or exercise books as preparation for entrance examinations. Memorization, correctness and accuracy which EFL Japanese students had become aware of in English language learning result in learners’ difficulty in using the target language, especially when trying to produce their own ideas in English. Using expressive pedagogy can enable students to overcome this difficulty. Expressive pedagogy is student-centered and places students and their intellectual and psychological development at the center of the process, providing opportunities to

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