


Linguistic Creativity in Japanese High School Students' Haikus: A Qualitative Analysis

Robert G. Arrogante^{1*}

¹ University of Perpetual Help System Dalta, Philippines

*Corresponding author's email: robert.arrogante@perpetual.edu.ph

*  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7933-7243>

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ABSTRACT

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Although haiku has gained attention as a pedagogical tool in second language (L2) instruction, its use in junior high school EFL classrooms remains underexplored. This study examines how Japanese junior high school students navigate the limitations of haiku to create meaningful and imaginative expressions of language. A qualitative descriptive analysis was conducted on 52 student-written haikus from a classroom-based writing activity. Findings reveal students demonstrate lexical creativity through vivid sensory imagery, nature-based vocabulary, emotional expressions, and modern references. Syntactic creativity emerges in omitted subjects and verbs, unconventional word order, and fragmented structure. Figurative language use, including metaphor and symbolism, enables students to convey complex emotions and abstract ideas. Thematic analysis highlights recurring themes such as seasonal imagery, nostalgia, personal reflection, and contemporary influences like technology. The study highlights haiku's pedagogical value in fostering self-expression, linguistic precision, and cultural engagement. This demonstrates that structural limitations can serve as a catalyst for linguistic and creative development in young EFL learners.

Introduction

Linguistic creativity has received recent emphasis in language instruction as something crucial for developing not just language skills but also higher levels of critical thinking. Language classes at all levels are now encouraged to engage students in creative writing exercises as a means of both stimulating language use and encouraging self-expression (Eriksson, 2022). Poetry, a more condensed form of creative writing, is often left out of such exercises, but some language teachers have found its use to be yet another way of making language classes more engaging. Literature suggests that creative writing promotes language competence and develops critical thinking and self-expression in students (Banegas & Lowe, 2021; Crahay, 2024). Using different poetic genres, specifically haiku, has become an effective pedagogical strategy because of its brevity and focus on rich imagery and affective resonance (Rosenhan & Galloway,

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2019). This practice aligns with the increased focus on culturally enhanced pedagogy to advance linguistic ability while promoting cross-cultural awareness (Kim, 2022).

Haiku is a short form of Japanese poetry traditionally composed of three lines with a 5-7-5 syllable structure, often capturing a moment in nature or an emotional impression through vivid imagery and seasonal reference (kigo), emphasizing simplicity, subtlety, and depth (Higginson & Harter, 1985). Despite the heightened integration of haiku in language classrooms, some challenges and research gaps have manifested. Of concern is the absence of research investigating the role of specific poetic genres, including haiku, in shaping learners' linguistic acquisition, especially at the secondary level (Ghani & Din, 2017). Although the literature has approached linguistic creativity in the context of general writing or among adult populations like university students, there is a significant gap in understanding how junior high school students work around the structural limitations of haiku to be creative through lexical, syntactic, and figurative devices (Hancı-Azizoğlu, 2018). In addition, there are questions about how the strict form of the haiku will affect students' expression of complicated ideas and feelings and the thematic and linguistic patterns that may result from their writing (Bielo, 2019). This research responded to these concerns by observing how junior high school students express linguistic creativity in haikus.

This study focused on the lexical, syntactical, and figural use of the language, the dominant types or themes of the linguistic choice, and how the structural boundaries of the haiku affect the creative work of the students (Sundari et al., 2018). In doing so, the study intended to address a wide gap in the literature and augment the existing body of knowledge on the ways and means through which haiku can facilitate linguistic creativity in the classroom (Sadiq, 2023). The implications of this study's findings have important applications to researchers, curriculum writers, and language educators in terms of the facilitation of more informed teaching of the language through the employment of creative writing exercises, like haiku, in the classroom (Alanezi, 2024).

Furthermore, the present study emphasizes the useful role of various writing genres in promoting language skills and creativity (Yazdanjoo & Fallahpour, 2018). The findings have significant implications in informing language teachers on how to bring a balance of grammatical competence and opportunities of self-expression, enhancing the acquisition of the language in their junior high school students (Manzoor et al., 2020). Adding haiku to the curriculum widens its scope and provides students with new and personalized ways of accessing the language. Thus, promoting a more integrated method of language teaching (Marina, 2018).

Haiku as a pedagogical device poses a fascinating challenge in the development of linguistic creativity, especially in the context of junior high school students, who are in the beginning stage of learning a new language, such as English. In exploring the dynamic tension of structural constraints and expressive freedom of haiku, this study hopes to enrich the broader context of creative writing in the field of foreign, second, or other languages, while keeping in mind the need to incorporate culturally responsive and expressive pedagogy in the curriculum (Fitria, 2024). Findings of the study carry implications beyond the classroom walls, sharing useful insights concerning the ways in which teaching strategies can produce more dynamic and engaging class learning, and value creativity and critical thinking (Banegas & Lowe, 2021).

Literature review

Linguistic Creativity in Education

Instruction of linguistic creativity in the pedagogical classroom is a rich phenomenon encompassing many facets of the use of language, pedagogy, and cognitive processes in the learning of languages. Empirical evidence in the literature attests to the development of creativity in instruction to promote learning and engagement of students generally. For example, Corsino et al. (2022) note that the behavior of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers in facilitating students' creativity towards English learning accounts for a high extent of high school students' English learning. The finding attests to the viability of creative instructional strategies engaging the students in active participation in English learning. Akintayo (2024) also seeks to conceptualize novel routes of the uptake of multilingualism in the classroom, hypothesizing that embracing linguistic diversity enriches the learning exercise and develops creativity in students. Sakaryalı (2024) proved that environments with multilingualism enhance creativity, and Phan (2023) noticed that collaborative learning in writing classes “makes the environment more dynamic, participative, and exploratory” (p.48), thus creating a favorable environment for creative language uses. Similarly, Dang (2024) claimed that peer feedback enhances students' expressive ability and writing outcomes through collaborative creativity in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

Incorporating creative writing and other innovative teaching methodologies has been proven to improve language learning outcomes. Creative writing in EFL classrooms supports language development and stimulates students' creative expression (Mardiningrum, 2024). Huh and Lee (2019) corroborate this by stipulating the centrality of creative pedagogy in developing a learning environment that promotes creativity and linguistic ability for foreign language learners. Furthermore, Jones (2019) comments that there is an increasing perception among language teaching practitioners on the necessity of including creativity in teaching practices to help develop a more interactive and lively learning environment. Additionally, the literature indicates that particular instructional designs may systematically develop creativity. Mróz and Ocetkiewicz (2021) take the stance that educators must develop students' creativity, which may be done through focused pedagogical interventions. Similarly, Kirss et al. (2021) present a systematic review of the success factors in multilingual education, highlighting the necessity of efficient teaching approaches in fostering creativity and linguistic competence. As suggested by Cuong (2024), the supportive learning ecosystem concept also supports the notion that creativity must be incorporated into the general learning environment to improve student performance. The recent literature on linguistic creativity in education highlights the teacher's pivotal role, pedagogic creative practice, and multilingual and multicultural approaches in developing students' creativity. By adopting these variables, teachers can make language learning more enjoyable and practical. Thus, developing linguistic competence and students' creative potential.

Haiku as a Pedagogical Tool

Haiku, a classical type of Japanese poetry, has been adopted as a successful pedagogical technique in various educational settings. This paper provides the cultural and historical background of haiku in education, the structural elements of haiku, its potential to evoke creativity and self-expression, and the pedagogical merits of haiku in Second language (L2) acquisition. Haiku, a genre of Japanese origin defined by concise brevity and orientation towards nature, is historically deep-seated. It is a literary device and a vehicle of cultural transmission and epistemological construction. "Hana wa sakuragi, hito wa bushi" is a phrase

conveying the beauty aspect of the flower theme of the cherry blossom in Japanese tradition and custom, one not too unfamiliarly enshrined in haiku verse (Ramlan, 2021). This aesthetic value translates into educational contexts where haiku can be employed to learn about Japanese aesthetics and cultural values. Including haiku in curricula can promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, by enabling students to experiment with expressions focused on observation and reflection on nature (Gil, 2018).

Haiku is defined by its structural constraints, traditionally having three lines following a uniform syllable pattern of 5-7-5. This style both refines and condenses linguistic usage, requiring students to express elaborate feelings and sensory details in a limited space. Also, the use of kigo (seasonal words) and kireji (cutting words) greatly improves the haiku, adding new levels of meaning and richness in the poetic pieces (Iida, 2017). These structural components not only cognitively challenge students to create imaginatively with language but also improve their capacity for building imagery and communicating emotion through the economy of expression (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023). Haiku is an excellent tool for facilitating creativity and self-expression in the students. Studies have shown that haiku writing can decrease the affective filter so that students can write about their feelings and emotions more freely (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023).

Such personal connection is vital in learning environments that might otherwise be dehumanizing (Iñiguez & Rodas-Pacheco, 2022). Haiku writing has also been associated with self-transcendent emotions, which can promote well-being and life satisfaction (Kato, 2024). Students can discover more of themselves and their emotions by looking at nature and their own lives, thereby developing a better relationship with their creative processes (Ihanus, 2022).

Pedagogical Advantages of Haiku in Second Language (L2) Learning

The use of haiku in L2 instruction offers several pedagogical benefits. Writing haiku allows learners to use the target language in a functional context, hence facilitating the acquisition of the target language through imaginative engagement (Iida, 2017). Syntactical constraints of haiku writing can also guide learners toward finding their true voice in the target language, while, at the same time, overcoming the difficulty of summarizing abstract concepts effectively (Iida, 2017). Empirical studies suggest that haiku can also support EFL students in academic writing, hence supporting both linguistic competence and cognitive processes (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023; Iñiguez & Rodas-Pacheco, 2022). Writing haiku not only develops one's vocabulary but also helps in identifying a sense of ownership of the target language, as students create texts meaningful to their lives and close to their cultural environment (Liu et al., 2022).

Hong-Nguyen and Wolff-Michael's (2019) work highlights that including haiku in curricula has multiple benefits that extend beyond learning formal writing structures: they involve aesthetic, intellectual, and therapeutic levels, empathy development, and transformative learning experiences. Reviewing online resources for haiku education, they identified two key pedagogical discourses, "talking about" and "doing," and recommend embracing authentic practice ("doing haiku") more to maximize their advantages. As an example, they describe that teachers teach haiku not just to study syllabic structure but also to initiate emotional engagement and reflection upon oneself, often in unconventional learning situations like social work and health education. This demarcates that by shifting theoretical knowledge to practical practice within one's learning environment, students learn not just a knowledge of poetry but also advanced emotional expression, empathy building, and introspection opportunities, thus affording students a holistic creative writing education that goes beyond structure of language.

Haiku as a pedagogical tool provides a favorable learning atmosphere that supports creativity, personal connection, and target language learning. Because of its cultural and historical richness, structural simplicity, and utility in L2 instruction, it highlights its specific role in modern instruction practices. By incorporating haiku in curriculum planning, language teachers can create more dynamic and fruitful learning situations that address students on various levels and language abilities.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on Carter's (2004) theoretical framework of linguistic creativity. In Carter's view, linguistic creativity is a central feature of everyday use of language rather than a property of advanced literary composition. He underlines the fact that creativity occurs through playful manipulation of the language, pointing out that creativity can be applied by individuals even in structured situations, such as in the case of poetry (Carter, 2004). The work of Carter is important to the study of linguistic creativity in that it provides a theoretical platform that clarifies how creativity in expressions can be achieved in different situations, including in classrooms. Carter's claims of how creativity and language interact have had uses in applied linguistics, specifically in the fields of language instruction and the study of creativity in mundane communication (Jones, 2019). This orientation invites teachers to note and develop the creative potential of students, thus creating a classroom environment that supports linguistic innovation and exploration. Carter's seminal research on linguistic creativity highlights that creativity is an omnipresent feature of language use, which can be investigated in several forms, including ordered poetic forms such as haikus. The model supports examining students' lexical, syntactic, and thematic decisions, referring to how creativity is achieved within formalized poetic structures.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do junior high school students demonstrate linguistic creativity in their haikus through lexical, syntactic, and figurative language use?
2. What patterns or themes emerge in the linguistic choices made by students in their haikus?
3. How do haiku constraints shape students' linguistic creativity?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study's participants were 15-year-old junior high school students from a Japanese junior high school in Northern Japan. Although there was no formal testing, the English level of the students can be classified as beginner. These students composed their haikus in English as class activities under creative writing. The students were given five sessions, each lasting 50 minutes, to write their Haikus. The first session was an introduction to haikus, during which they watched a video on how to systematically write a haiku in English using the sensory method. The remaining sessions were allocated to the actual writing of the students' haikus with the guidance and support of their English teachers.

Fifty-two haikus were gathered for analysis to provide a good mix of the students' creative works. Every haiku expressed the individual voices and opinions of the students since they were

allowed to write about anything they wanted. In order to uphold ethical integrity, the students' anonymity was preserved by giving a unique code to every haiku. No demographic information, including gender or age, was attached to the respective haikus since the sole interest was in the creative content of their written productions. The students were at a beginner's level in English.

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants. The selection was non-random, as the study specifically aimed to examine the linguistic creativity of students composing haikus in an educational setting. A total of 52 haikus were collected for analysis. The focus was on the students' linguistic and thematic choices rather than their demographic information.

Design of the Study

The present study utilized a qualitative descriptive model to examine the linguistic creativity of haikus written by Japanese students at the junior high school level. This qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enabled the deep exploration of the students' use of language, creativity, and theme choice. This descriptive approach seeks to expose underlying patterns, themes, and stylistics of the haikus while avoiding strict quantitative parameters. This analysis framework was deliberately balanced in keeping with the students' original creations so that it could highlight their natural linguistic potential and capabilities. By using this methodological approach, the study sought to examine the processes by which students create innovation in the classical haiku structure while expressing personal, cultural, and emotional narratives.

Data collection & analysis

The first step of data collection included the gathering of haikus written by students in the classroom context. The author collected the written pieces from the students to ensure that the process was unobtrusive and natural. Before the inclusion of the haikus in the study, permission was sought from the responsible teacher of the relevant class. The examination of the haikus used Thematic Linguistic Analysis, which combines qualitative content analysis and linguistic analysis to uncover the patterns of creativity. Thematic analysis, upon which the approach is based, systematically identifies, examines, and reports the patterns of creativity (themes) apparent in qualitative data. According to Miles et al. (2014), thematic analysis facilitates the researcher's exploration of the data for recurring concepts and themes. Therefore, this method is eminently applicable when investigating the intrinsic complexities of poetry as a means of creativity in the classroom context (Gao & Zhang, 2020).

The first stage of the analysis requires a close interaction with the data, whereby one repeatedly reads through every haiku in order to develop a deep sense of its meaning, tone, and stylistic features. This approach accords with Mayring's (2014) qualitative content analysis methodology, which supports a close interaction with the data in order to discover its intrinsic qualities. Notes initially are taken of salient themes, evocative words and phrases, and motifs of the work, in keeping with the iterative nature of thematic analysis by Flick (2014), which emphasizes revisiting the text in theme development.

Following preliminary orientation, a systematic coding system is applied in order to isolate the essential elements of linguistic creativity. For enhancing transparency and methodological rigor, coding was carried out using an iterative and systematic approach. First, the haikus were inductively thoroughly read, and codes were developed manually through annotation of both thematic and linguistic features present in the haikus. The researcher recorded incidences of lexical creativity (such as figurative language and sensory vocabulary), syntactic creativity (such as sentence fragmentation and irregular word order), and thematic features (such as seasonal imagery, tone, and cultural reference). Haikus were analyzed line by line. Categories were repeatedly refined through constant comparative analysis to maintain consistency. Memo-

writing was used throughout the process to record analyses and patterns of emerging themes. To further establish reliability, coded data were inspected once again following a two-week interval in order to assess internal consistency as well as coding stability. Coding falls under three primary categories: lexical creativity, syntactic creativity, and thematic development. Lexical creativity deals with the use of unusual lexical choices, sensory detail, and figurative words conveying metaphorical meaning, which reinforce the depth of the poem. Empirical studies supporting the use of lexical choice in enhancing the emotional and imagery-evoking potential of words are evident in studies revealing how specific words provoke emotion and generate imagery (Furman et al., 2007). Syntactic creativity is defined by the divergence of traditional haiku composition in the use of discontinuous sentences and narrative orderings, which create a more expressive poem. This trait is a primary object of analysis since it is the novel use of language diverging from traditional composition, a theme that is investigated in a variety of academic studies of poetic composition (Arcilla Jr., 2024).

The development of themes reinforces the recurring motifs present, including seasonal imagery, emotional passion, and cultural reference. Analysis of the themes goes beyond mere motif detection; it also involves the interpretation of the meaning of the motifs in the larger poem message. This view is supported by the work of Ariani (2024), whereby she clarifies the capabilities of thematic elements of poetry to trigger imagination and creativity and thus enrich the reading process. In addition, thematic study in poetry can provide deep insights into emotional and cultural truths, as expressed by Indrawati et al. (2020), highlighting the thematic connections in a pedagogical context.

Thematic and linguistic analysis provides a solid basis for deconstructing the haikus. This method allows a deep exploration of linguistic innovation by using the systematic application of qualitative content analysis combined with thematic interpretation. It also aids a deeper understanding of poetic forms and contributes to a more engaging discourse in literary study in terms of creativity.

Results

Research question No. 1: How do junior high school students demonstrate linguistic creativity in their haikus through lexical, syntactic, and figurative language use?

Linguistic Creativity

This study investigated the ways in which the junior high school students expressed linguistic creativity in their lexical, syntactic, and figurative language use in haikus. Results showed students using a wide variety of creative strategies to achieve maximum meaning under the structural limits of the haiku. Students expressed rich imagery, emotion, and personal thoughts using lexical choice, syntactic structure, and figurative use of words.

Lexical Creativity

Students' lexical creativity in haikus is realized in the use of descriptive sensory detail, reference to the time of year, and appeal to the emotion, demonstrating their ability to craft evocative imagery and create emotional responses within the haiku's constraints. This creativity is not a result of self-expression alone but also of instructional actions that facilitate emotional connection and linguistic play. As the literature indicates, haiku writing exercises can bridge affective barriers and facilitate linguistic processing activity in helping students to open up and express

their feelings and emotions, thereby facilitating creativity in the use of words and meaning construction (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023).

Sensory and Nature-Based Vocabulary

Lexical creativity in haikus is shown in the extensive use of sensory words catering to the different senses of the reader. It is best realized in the depiction of nature and the four seasons. In Haiku No. 5:

*Golden wave locusts
Jumping in father's paddy
Deep red, the evening sun*

The metaphor of "golden wave" describes the locusts and suggests movement and rhythm, adding to the haiku's visual beauty. Such imagery aligns with cognitive poetics' precepts, which focus on how sensory experiences inform our understanding and appreciation of poetry (Vandaele, 2021).

Haiku No. 37 also uses color and imagery to describe a peaceful night scene:

*The toy fireworks
Blooming on a quiet night
Like a full moon*

The fireworks are compared to blooming flowers, reinforcing their fleeting beauty. The allusion to the "full moon" appeals to traditional haiku beauty and demonstrates a profound sense of nature's transitory nature, which is a key to successful haiku writing (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023). Sensory language in these haikus engages the reader and encourages them to participate in the evoked emotions and scenes.

Emotional Expressions and Personal Reflections

In addition to nature imagery, students successfully express personal feelings through word selection. For instance, Haiku No. 28 conveys unspoken grief with sparse but evocative words:

*I loved you
Looking up at the summer sky
Tears falling*

The stark brevity of "I loved you" heightens the poem's emotional impact. The contrast of the generally bright summer sky and the atmosphere of bereavement demonstrates the students' use of word choice to create contrast. This emotive connotation is also reinforced by studies that indicate that haiku, as a type of poem, is a powerful vehicle of the expression of deep and complicated feelings and experiences (Sulastri et al., 2022). Likewise, Haiku No. 13 captures nostalgia and friendship:

*The last summer
Together with my baseball teammates
I will not forget my best friend*

"The last summer" is a poignant farewell, and the use of remembrance in a direct manner provides a personal touch. This shows the manner in which the students blend personal emotion and poetic lexis, creating a thick and textured web of emotional meaning and engaging the reader (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023; Sulastri et al., 2022).

Modern and Everyday Vocabulary

Some of the students' haikus tried to avoid the traditional nature imagery by using modern elements that depict the realities of contemporary student life. In Haiku No. 41:

Summer festival
Home alone
Watching YouTube

This haiku contrasts the thrill of a "festival in summer" and the loneliness of "watching YouTube" to imply a realization of the role that technology plays in defining contemporary experiences. Its use of common words makes the poem contemporary while commenting subtly on shifting social relations. Such use of contemporary concerns is in agreement that the verse art of poetry is able to reflect social milieus and personal lives (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023; Sulastri et al., 2022). Blending the conventional haiku forms and contemporary words indicates the flexible character of poetic composition and its applicability in contemporary society.

The lexical creativity of students' haikus is a three-dimensional effect of sensory engagement, emotional connection, and contemporary relevance. Students use words purposefully to create sensory pictures and stir emotion, illustrating lived experiences and common social concerns. The teaching potential of haiku writing exercises also reinforces students' linguistic ability and emotional communication. This type of poem is hence effective in the classroom. By continually experimenting and creating in the haiku genre, students are aiding in the development of poetic language and meaning.

Syntactical Creativity

Haikus have a specific pattern of syllables, but the students proved imaginative in writing because they omitted subjects and verbs, rearranged the sentence order, and wrote with fragmented sentences to convey thoughts and refine their poems. Modifying their sentences is significant because using new ways with their words makes them more engaged with poetry (Fithriani, 2021; Jesudas & Sajeevial, 2022).

Omitting Subjects and Verbs

One common technique was omitting subjects and verbs to create ambiguity, requiring the reader to infer meaning. For instance, in Haiku No. 7:

Children fireworks
Together
Shining eyes

There is no explicit subject-verb relationship, which allows the meaning to be interpreted in various ways. This approach aligns with contemporary poetry studies regarding how omission can generate feelings and get readers to pay more attention to what they read (Tamesis et al., 2022; Anggiamurni, 2020). The reader is asked to picture children viewing or igniting fireworks, their bright eyes indicating excitement and amazement. Similarly, Haiku No. 3:

Mid Summer
Nap cool wind
Comfortable

Here, the student does not have a verb or a subject. This makes the reader imagine a body lying peacefully in the wind. This is evidence that omissions can engage the reader more because

they can use their minds to visualize the image (Yuana et al., 2023). Another example, Haiku No. 24:

*Weak wind
Katori Senko smells
Quiet night*

It gives a sense through the senses but does not say so, leaving the reader wondering what is omitted. This is a typical means of writing poetry in which sensory information is more significant than the narrative, with the feelings being more central (Yuana et al., 2023).

Rearranging Sentence Order

Another way the students accomplished this is by rearranging the sentences to emphasize specific meanings or to surprise the reader. Haiku No. 36 exemplifies this technique:

*Summer night
Even in the dark
The light of the fireflies will not lose*

Here, the phrase "Even in the dark" interrupts the natural flow of the sentence, enhancing the contrast between darkness and the fireflies' persistence in glowing. This syntactic disruption is consistent with research that suggests such techniques can create tension and highlight thematic contrasts within poetry (Fithriani, 2021). Likewise, in Haiku No. 21:

*Light-up decorations and a star crown
Dress on the tree
I will start this happy day*

Putting "Dress on the tree" amid two other independent thoughts places it with a new, profound significance that makes the readers realize the cheerful mood. This also agrees with the research: rearranging the things in a poem can enable us to derive more meaningful things and make reading more vibrant (Jesudas & Sajeevlal, 2022). A second illustration is Haiku No. 46:

*Cool summer night
The flowers blooming in the sky
It is like you are stopping with me for a moment*

This haiku rearranges the poem's words to create the illusion of being dreamy and contemplative. It also establishes how the structure of the sentences can elicit powerful emotions (Abdelkadir, 2023; Lila, 2023).

Using Fragmented Phrases

Students also used fragmented phrases for poetic effect. Haiku No. 42 illustrates this:

*I am running fast
Going sliding with my glove
The stadium is full of cheers*

The sentence structure mimics the breathless, rapid movements of the scene, using short, action-driven phrases to build intensity. This technique has been noted in recent poetry analyses to convey urgency and immediacy, allowing readers to experience the action as if they were part of it (Khan et al., 2023). Another example is Haiku No. 35:

*A silent night
I am playing games
Very sleepy*

The suddenness is like the drowsiness people experience from staying up late playing. This is evidence that research indicated that the use of short sentences can easily express emotions and times, which can reinforce the poem (Tamesis et al., 2022; Bezugla & Tkachivska, 2022). Also, Haiku No. 17:

*Hot summer day
Playing sand in the eye*

...

This haiku uses short sentences to create a vivid image. It makes the reader experience the irritation in the eye from the presence of the sand. This is similar to contemporary speeches in poems. They illustrate how broken and condensed sentences can create vivid images (Fithriani, 2021; Romanova, 2023).

These trends indicate how the students use imaginative sentence forms in developing their haikus. By omissions, word rearrangement, and sentence fragmentation, the learners demonstrated the realization that the use of haikus can be dynamic poems. This corroborates research indicating that the use of creative writing is essential in teaching languages because it aids in the enhancement of the languages as well as emotional competencies of the learners (Yuana et al., 2023; Корольова, 2021).

Research question No. 2: What patterns or themes emerge in the linguistic choices made by students in their haikus?

Themes and Patterns

The analysis of students' haikus indicates significant insights regarding their lives, emotions, and attitudes as Japanese junior high school students. Trends and repetition of linguistic use in their haikus indicate their creativity and awareness of how they perceive their environment, cope with interpersonal relationships, and deal with cultural pressures. These haikus serve as a lens through which we observe young students' daily life, dreams, and problems, and how they relate closely to nature, schooling, present time, and emotional introspection.

Nature and Seasonal Imagery

The students' use of seasonal terminology and imagery resonates with the cultural sensibility of kacho-fugetsu (花鳥風月) or the "flower, bird, wind, moon". It is a deep appreciation in Japan for the ephemeral character of the seasons. This, along with the education on and memory of haiku, creates a link with nature that can be a source of strength to propel forward into the future. For instance, Haiku No. 26:

*Cool spring day
Under cherry trees
I ate a three-colored dumpling*

This haiku is related to the tradition of hanami (flower viewing), a common event celebrated in Japan. Resting under a sakura tree while eating a dango (a dumpling) is comforting, connecting, and representative of cultural heritage. Therefore, students associate nature with family and community (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

Similarly, Haiku No. 30:

*Blowing cool wind
Waving rice stalks
I study while looking at it*

This piece connects education with nature, inspiring students and bringing them love for their surroundings. This contrast of moving rice stalks and still studying, on a subtle level, describes the balance between diligence and daydreaming, a common phenomenon among junior high school students. These connections encapsulate the Japanese idea of *mono no aware* (物の哀), or the awareness of impermanence, the seasonal shifts that reflect the ephemeral nature of childhood and youth (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

Emotional Reflection and Nostalgia: The Transition from Childhood to Adolescence

Many haikus express yearning, nostalgia, and the passage of time, which may represent the transitional period of junior high school students between childhood and adolescence. It is a time when social experimentation, friendship building, and a realization of change and impermanence are in full force. For instance, Haiku No. 13 expresses the spirit of valuing friendships while in school:

*The last summer
Together with my baseball teammates
I will not forget my best friend*

The reference to "the last summer" invokes an impending transition to high school, where students may have to leave behind close friends. It means saying goodbye to childhood friends but remembering them and all the memories, ties, and fun (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Similarly, Haiku No. 27 conveys the energy and nostalgia of youth:

*The shining fireworks
The sound beats with my heart
This is youth*

Fireworks (Hanabi, 花火) are another staple of Japanese summer festivals (*natsu matsuri*, 夏祭り), during which students spend their evenings away from home and relish their joy and freedom with friends. The saying "this is youth" indicates that the moment matters and that junior high school students tend to romanticize their experiences, knowing they are transient (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Conversely, themes of loneliness and isolation also emerge in the students' haikus, as illustrated by Haiku No. 23:

*Like soda bubbles
Lonely summer days
Next year, too?*

The analogy of loneliness to bubbles in soda poignantly encapsulates solitude's transient but recurring quality. The question at the end, "Next year, too?" suggests doubts a student may have regarding whether solitude will last. This haiku captures how some students experience a disconnection from shared experiences with their peers, which is common during adolescence (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Similarly, Haiku No. 41 contrasts vibrant communal traditions with modern digital isolation:

Summer festival
Home alone
Watching YouTube

This juxtaposition reflects how technology shapes contemporary youth culture, allowing students to participate in social events virtually but not necessarily emotionally (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Modern Influences: The Impact of Technology and Contemporary Life

Although haiku is a traditional form of poetry, some students incorporate modern experiences and urban life, demonstrating that haiku remains a relevant and evolving expression.

For instance, Haiku No. 45:

Because I am free today
Play at an amusement arcade with a friend
But I do not have money

This haiku captures the playful yet frustrating experience of wanting to enjoy free time but lacking the means. The mention of an amusement arcade reflects contemporary leisure activities, illustrating how students blend traditional poetic structure with modern life (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

Similarly, Haiku No. 44:

Eat oysters
Spend New Year's Eve in the bathroom
My father and younger sister

This humorous haiku reflects the intersection of food, family, and personal misfortunes, showcasing how students innovate with haiku conventions to create relatable anecdotes. The use of everyday experiences in haikus indicates a shift in how young poets adapt traditional forms to reflect contemporary realities, making their work more engaging and relevant (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

2.4. Symbolism and Metaphors: Developing a Deeper Understanding of Life

Many haikus go beyond literal descriptions, using symbols to represent abstract emotions, suggesting that junior high school students are capable of philosophical and poetic thinking. For example, Haiku No. 36:

Summer night
Even in the dark
The light of the fireflies will not lose

In this haiku, fireflies symbolize perseverance and hope, reflecting an awareness that small light sources can endure even in dark times. This metaphor shows the struggles of the students with academic pressure, troubles in building relationships with peers, and discovering self-identity (Stephenson & Rosen, 2015).

Similarly, Haiku No. 15 employs fireworks symbolizing fleeting joy:

Senkou fireworks
Our happy summer
Keeps going forever

While fireworks never last longer than a few seconds, the statement "keeps going forever" indicates that the feelings and memories can outlive the moment. This desire to hold on to the fun as time goes by deeply resonates with students who are undergoing change (Stephenson & Rosen, 2015).

Junior high school haikus in Japan express a deep sense of attachment to the natural setting, cultural heritage, emotional introspection, and contemporary life. This ability to combine personal lives and poetic words shows that haiku is not only a classroom assignment but also a viable vehicle of self-expression and meaning-construction. These findings attest to the emotional maturity and linguistic creativity of student participants and support the legitimacy of poetry in foreign/second-language learning as a site of identity, emotion, and environmental probing (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021; Shipley & Williams, 2019; Stephenson & Rosen, 2015).

Research Question No. 3: How do haiku constraints shape students' linguistic creativity?

The Influence of Haiku Constraints on Linguistic Creativity

The conventional structural constraints of haiku (5-7-5 pattern, brevity, reliance upon implicit meaning) influenced the creativity of students in a variety of ways. Additionally, the findings suggest that the constraints assisted students' linguistic creativity in general in that they allowed students to refine the choice of words, enhance the ability to express abstract meanings and attain flexibility in creative sentence formation. This aligns with the notion that structured forms can foster innovative thinking and expression (Sage & Null, 2022).

Encouraging Concise and Impactful Language

Students had to prioritize essential words due to the syllabic limitations of haiku. For example, Haiku No. 9:

Sweat all over my uniform
...
...

This captures exhaustion in just a few words, emphasizing the intensity of physical activity junior high school students sometimes do at school. Similarly, Haiku No. 27:

The shining fireworks
The sound beats with my heart
This is youth

This haiku illustrates how the compact form heightens emotions, allowing students to encapsulate a profound personal experience within a limited space. The brevity of haiku forced students to carefully select words that conveyed strong imagery and emotion, enhancing their ability to communicate meaning with fewer words. This skill is beneficial in various writing contexts, as noted in studies highlighting the effectiveness of concise language in educational settings (Iñiguez & Pacheco, 2022).

Fostering Creativity through Implied Meaning and Minimalism

Some haikus required readers to infer meaning rather than providing explicit details. For instance, Haiku No. 10:

Very hot summer day
I sip quickly
Cold Chinese food

Meanwhile, it suggests relief from the summer heat through action rather than direct description. Additionally, Haiku No. 31:

*The air conditioner's wind is blowing in summer classrooms
At first, it was very cool
But as time passed, it was cold*

This implies the passage of time and a shift in comfort without explicitly stating it, making the poem more open-ended and layered. The need to exclude extraneous details and rely on the reader's inference also teaches students to construct dense and multi-layered meaning in their writing and helps them become more effective storytellers. This supports the argument that minimalist writing provokes more reaction and interpretation by the reader (Friedenberg et al., 2023).

Enhancing Sensory and Imagery-Based Expression

Interestingly, many of the students' haikus leverage on sensory details to make readers feel a specific moment. For example, Haiku No. 22:

*The sound of melting ice
In barley tea
...*

This haiku pairs sound and flavor, so the readers feel the moment fully. Similarly, Haiku No. 40:

*The hottest summer day
We ate lovely watermelon
By the riverside*

They use a variety of senses - temperature, taste, and atmosphere - to draw the reader in and transport them to the scene. These samples show how the students learned to craft textured and evocative experiences using descriptive words, which improved their use of imagery in other types of writing. Research has shown that sensory engagement in writing can significantly enhance reader connection and emotional response (Zhang & Wang, 2025).

Encouraging Playful and Metaphorical Thinking

Some students employed humor and exaggeration to make their haikus more engaging. For example, in Haiku No. 44:

*Eat oysters
Spend New Year's Eve in the bathroom
My father and younger sister*

This haiku uses an unexpected and humorous contrast to create an amusing yet relatable scene. Others utilized symbolism, as seen in Haiku No. 15:

*Senkou fireworks
Our happy summer
Keeps going forever*

Here, fireworks represent fleeting yet cherished summer memories. The ability to think metaphorically and incorporate symbolic meaning in a restricted form like haiku indicates growth in abstract thinking and creative expression, skills applicable in poetry and narrative

writing. This reflects broader educational trends that advocate including creative writing to develop critical thinking and imaginative skills (Baer, 2024).

Reinforcing a Reflective and Observational Mindset

The haiku form encouraged students to slow down and observe small details, fostering mindfulness. For instance, Haiku No. 30:

*Blowing cool wind
Waving rice stalks
I study while looking at it*

This demonstrates the connection between nature and reflection. Similarly, Haiku No. 52:

*In a dark walkway
Fireflies
Give directions*

This suggests a quiet moment of observation, using fireflies as a metaphor for guidance. Writing haiku trains students to focus on their surroundings, capturing moments with precision and depth- a practice that improves their ability to describe events and settings in any form of writing. This mindfulness aspect has been linked to enhanced cognitive and emotional well-being in educational contexts (Matsumoto et al., 2023).

Beyond the individual effects of conciseness, implied meaning, sensory detail, and metaphorical thinking, haiku influenced students' linguistic creativity by requiring them to adapt language innovatively within structural constraints. The need to fit meaning into the strict 5-7-5 form pushed students to experiment with unconventional word order to maintain syllable limits, strategic omission of subjects/verbs to maximize impact while adhering to structure, and the use of figurative language to compress complex ideas into a few words.

In addition, students had to think beyond literal meaning, and they wrote more evocative, expressive, and nuanced materials. Although restrictive, the haiku structure, paradoxically, opened up possibilities for more flexible and artistic manipulation of language, a role that potentially could transfer to other styles of writing and communication. This aligns with the latest research on the role of restricted creativity exercises in enabling linguistic creativity and flexibility (Friedenberg et al., 2023).

These outcomes show how haiku constraints encouraged students to refine their language, think metaphorically, and engage in their worlds imaginatively and meaningfully. In general, haiku offered a site of linguistic creativity, wherein students could seek out and mold their expressiveness in a structured poetic form.

Figure 1.

Thematic map illustrating the key themes and sub-themes identified in students' haiku writing.

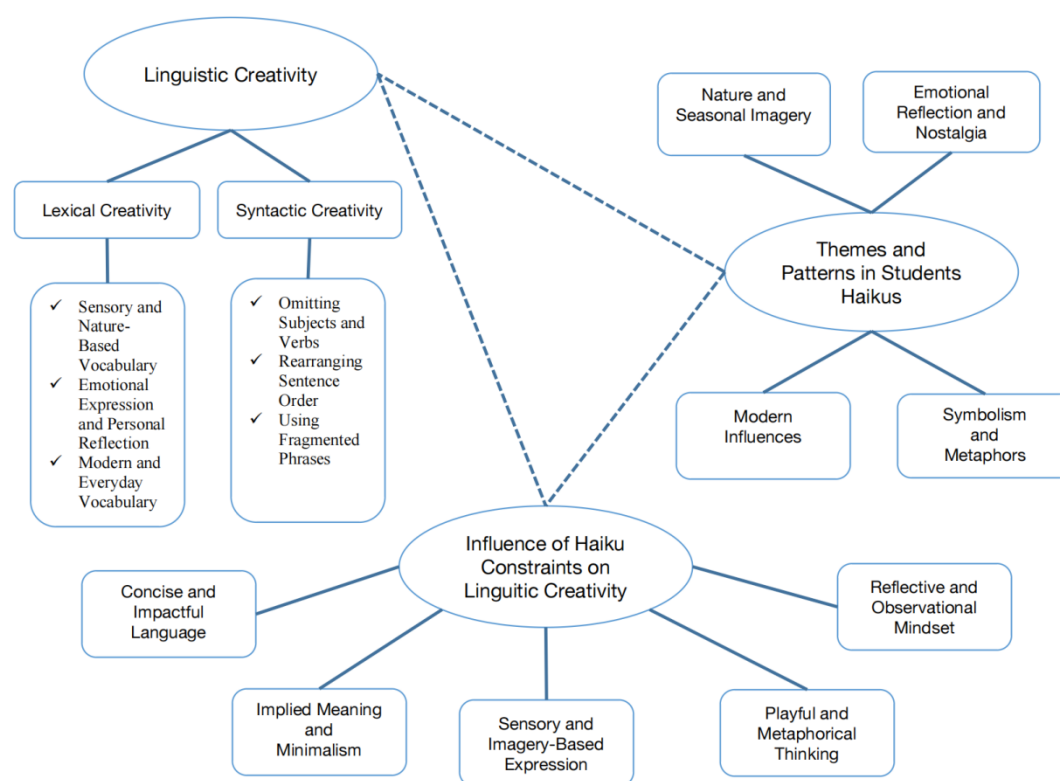


Figure 1 is a visual representation of the major themes and sub-themes found in the students' haikus. It reveals their linguistic creativity, thematic expressions, and how the students navigated haiku's constraints.

Discussion

Previous research studies have primarily focused on students at the tertiary level or general writing conventions (e.g., Mardiningrum, 2024; Hancı-Azizoğlu, 2018). The present study contributes to the literature by highlighting the haiku writings of Japanese junior high school students as a source of linguistic creativity. Although prior work has firmly established the pedagogical value of haiku for emotional and aesthetic expression (Iida, 2017; Stephenson & Rosen, 2015), this study follows up on these findings with empirical evidence that demonstrates how young EFL learners, like junior high school students, creatively work within the limitations of vocabulary, syntax, and thematic material when writing haiku. In contrast to many earlier studies that have been focused on general writing themes of cultural transfer or language acquisition, this analysis provides a close-up account of how the structural limitations of haiku enable creative linguistic expression. By focusing on a younger age group within an academic teaching context, this study stands out due to its investigation of reflective practices, metaphorical thinking, and the creation of new themes in poetry writing, factors that were primarily absent in prior studies. This study highlights the value in studying creative writing across developmental stages and teaching contexts.

This research supports the role of haiku in assisting students in linguistic creativity at the junior high school level. In the constraints of haiku, students displayed the ability to condense lexical alternatives effectively, manipulate syntactic structures, and utilize figurative language. Findings support the enhancement of students' ability to create nuanced images and convey multiple meanings, as well as the use of a more economical and expressive style of writing in writing haiku. In addition, the study indicates that the concise style of haiku subjects the students to the appreciation of effective words, and they utilize more conscious choice of words and sentence structures. The use of implied meaning and simple style develops their ability to create nuanced phrases, whereas the use of sensory words and metaphorical thinking develops their creativity in processing the text. These factors attest to the role of writing haiku as a useful instructional method, and students are able to master linguistic precision and artistic subtlety in writing. In the activity of writing a haiku, students also developed observational and introspective skills, and they demonstrated more sensitivity towards the environment and emotional condition. This research witnesses that haiku, being a structured poem, is a vehicle of linguistic creativity and is effective in establishing the quality of expressive and analysis writing in general.

Conclusion

While undoubtedly this study makes a contribution to the knowledge of the linguistic creativity of the haiku writing of Japanese junior high school students, a few of its limitations are significant. A major limitation lies with the limited sample size and context, since the study concentrated solely on 52 haikus written by students from a single school within Japan. The limited data may not reflect the full range of linguistic creativity within different educational environments, cohorts, or cultural groups. The use of purposive sampling also brings with it the possibility for bias since students were selected based upon their participation in a writing lesson within the classroom instead of through random selection. The findings may therefore not be transferable to the wider student population and may require special consideration for students with varying amounts of exposure to haiku or different levels of linguistic proficiency.

A second limitation involves the lack of demographic and contextual data related to students' prior exposure to haiku, their English proficiency, or other individual factors likely impacting their writing proficiency. Without this data, it is problematic to determine the meaning of individual differences in language creativity. Furthermore, the subjectivity involved with thematic and linguistic judgments is compounded by the qualitative nature of the study since the ensuing judgments about creativity, lexical choice, and stylistic patterns are dependent upon the researcher. Despite the use of systematic coding to enhance the strength of the analyses, the possibility for different interpretations and categorizations arising from different researchers remains likely. In addition, the study focused solely on written outputs, not including students' comments about their creative approaches. The inclusion of students' opinions through interviews or questionnaires would have allowed for deeper exploration into their thinking and the rationale behind their haiku composition.

Despite these limitations, the study remains valuable as it highlights the potential for haiku as an educational tool for developing language creativity. Future studies could rectify these deficiencies through widening the sample population, including students' opinions, and comparing analyses across different cultural and language groups to increase the validity and scope of the results. Similarly, future research may explore the long-term effects of haiku writing on students' broader language acquisition and its impact on different learner groups. Future studies may also examine the application of haiku in non-English languages, specifically

among young learners, to evaluate its contribution to linguistic acquisition across different linguistic contexts and age groups. Future studies may also examine the application of haiku in other languages, such as Spanish or French, to evaluate its contribution to linguistic creativity in various linguistic settings and various age brackets.

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Biodata

Robert Gloriane Arrogante is an English instructor in Japan and a former JET Programme ALT. As a Japanese government scholar, he studied curriculum development at Tokyo Gakugei University. He holds an MA in English, a TESOL certification, and is pursuing a PhD in Education with a major in English. His research focuses on language teaching and teacher development.