

*Two haiku or one? – a close linguistic analysis of two poems by Bashō*

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**Haiku Texts**

松尾芭蕉 (Matsuo Bashō)

Text 1

ふる池や	<i>huru+ike ya</i>	old+pond ah!
蛙飛込	<i>kawazu tobi+komu</i>	frog jump+be-included
水のおと	<i>mizu no oto</i>	water 's sound

Text 2

閑さや	<i>sizuka+sa ya</i>	still+ness ah!
岩にしみ入	<i>iwa ni simi+iru</i>	rock into seep+enter
蟬の聲	<i>semi no koe</i>	cicada 's voice

*Gloss Translation*

Text 1

time-worn pond – ah!  
a frog jumps in  
sound of water

Text 2

stillness – ah!  
seeps into rocks  
the voice of the cicada

Similarity (1): A – B – A structure

Table 1: Structural Similarity

	Text 1		Text 2	
A	<i>huru+ike ya</i>		<i>sizuka+sa ya</i>	
	[ <i>huru+ike</i> ] <sub>N</sub> A N <i>ya</i> ' <i>kireji</i> '	<i>huru</i> < <i>huru+i</i> (adj. 'old,' 'used,' or 'ancient')  <i>ike</i> (noun 'pond')	[ <i>sizuka+sa</i> ] <sub>N</sub> A Nml <i>ya</i> ' <i>kireji</i> '	<i>sizuka</i> < <i>sizuka+na</i> (adj. 'still,' 'silent,' or 'quiet') <i>-sa</i> (nominalizer, = '-ness')
B	<i>kawazu tobi+komu</i>		<i>iwa ni simi+iru</i>	
	[ <i>kawazu tobi+komu</i> ] <sub>s</sub> N V1+V2	<i>kawazu</i> (n. 'frog') Subject NP  V1 <i>tobi</i> < <i>tobu</i> (v. 'fly,' 'jump') V2 <i>komu</i> (verb; when attached to another verb(V1), = 'enter,' 'be included,' 'be completely or fully into a condition expressed by V1')	[ <i>iwa ni simi+iru</i> ] <sub>VP</sub> N particle V1+V2	<i>iwa</i> (noun 'rock,' 'stone,' or 'boulder') <i>ni</i> (particle='into') Locative Marker V1 <i>simi</i> < <i>simu</i> (v. 'seep [into]') V2 <i>iru</i> (verb 'enter [from outside into inside]'; v. when attached to another verb (V1), 'be completely or fully into a condition expressed by V1' or 'to continue to V1')
A	<i>mizu no oto</i>		<i>semi no koe</i>	
	[ <i>mizu no oto</i> ] <sub>NP</sub> N 's N	<i>mizu</i> (n. 'water') possessor N (bisyllabic) <i>no</i> (particle = 's) <i>oto</i> (n. 'sound') possessed N (bisyllabic)	[ <i>semi no koe</i> ] <sub>NP</sub> N 's N	<i>semi</i> (n. 'cicada') possessor N (bisyllabic) <i>no</i> (particle = 's) <i>koe</i> (n. 'voice') possessed N (bisyllabic)

Similarity (2): *Kireji* ('Cutting Letter') and Syntactic Loosening

The particle *ya* sets the first line off against the last two lines in both texts; this rhetorical particle, which is one of a set of more than a dozen (they are called "*kireji*" [= 'cutting letters']) divides a text into two parts, and sets these parts into one or more of a number of relationships, such as contrast, contradiction, exemplification, and so on. We have translated *ya* as "ah!" – for which we may be forgiven – but the strong emotions which are associated with *kireji* are not exhausted by wonderment, surprise, joy, shock, etc. In the first poem, the old pond (with its still water) stands in

opposition to the sound of water made by a frog jumping into the pond, and in the second poem, stillness seems inconsistent with the strident voice of the cicada, as it seeps into the rocks.

The multifaceted nature of any *kireji* is a bit like opening a window in a stuffy room, to let a breeze pass through and ruffle things. For example, in the first poem, the use of the common locative particle *ni* to form the phrase *huruike ni* ('into the old pond'), which would have made it explicit that a pond was the goal of the frog's jump, would have locked things into a much more well-defined constellation than does the *ya*, as we will see presently. The *ya* leaves it open as to whether the frog jumps into a pond or somewhere else.

In the second poem, the verb *simiiru* can be interpreted as having either the noun of the first line, *sizukasa*, or that of the last line, *semi no koe*, as its subject. Is it the cicada's voice that seeps, or the stillness? Both?

The first poem leaves us in something like a paradox; the second dumps us into an ambiguity we have no way to resolve. That is, no way within the strictures of rational thought. Bashō is not, however, concerned with giving us pat answers. He did not take his long journey through Japan because he already knew the answers. He undertook the outward journey to the "Far North," but if there had been no matching inward journey, the enterprise would not have survived.

Normally frogs make noise, while ponds are still. Normally, a cicada's voice is noisy, while stone is still. Can silence, breaking rules, speak?

### **Similarity (3): Exterior Lines**

Both poems return in the third line to a concept introduced in the first line: in the first haiku, we find two water words (*ike*, *mizu*); and in the second haiku, we find two words involving sound (*sizukasa*, *koe*).

### **Similarity (4): Initiator of "Sound" of Nature**

Most importantly, both poems turn on the transformative power of a sound of nature, a sound initiated by a *small, powerless creature*, a frog and a cicada. We are almost certain that it is not by chance that Bashō used these two creatures in these two haiku which express a very similar theme. There is a Chinese idiom, 蛙鳴蟬噪 (*wa ming chan zao*), which literally means "frog.cry.cicada.noise." That is, frogs and cicadas are considered to be noisy, loud, and annoying. Hence, this saying, when it is used to refer to texts or arguments, means loud arguments and texts of poor-quality. Bashō, known as having profound knowledge of Japanese and Chinese classics, would have been aware of this Chinese idiom.

### **Similarity (5): New Meaning of Silence**

What is most striking is that Bashō has given a completely new meaning to the most prototypical acts of these two creatures, frog and cicada; they produced sounds of nature; but their essential function, which we suspect that Bashō had in mind, is to call forth a deeper level, or kind, of silence after the motion through the air of either a jumping frog or of the sound waves produced by the shrill cry of the cicada.

### **Analysis of Sounds and Sound Patterns**

We find these structural & semantic parallels so striking that we seek to deepen our understanding of what Bashō does with these poems. Is it the power of sound that has led Bashō to "say" one thing twice? Is he helping us into a depth of stillness that the frogjump and the seeping of the cicada can equally lead us to?" Two or one?

## Haiku Template

Line 1<sub>FROG</sub>: [ [Σ<sub>1</sub> Σ<sub>2</sub> ]<sub>A</sub> [Σ<sub>3</sub> Σ<sub>4</sub> ]<sub>N</sub> Σ<sub>5</sub> ]<sub>NP</sub> 4 sonorant onsets!!

Kireiji

hu ru    i ke    ya  
 ↓ H—I—G—H    MID    LOW  
 vowel vowel    vowel    vowel  
 B—A—C—K    F—R—O—N—T    BACK  
 “old-”    “pond”    !

BACK(60%)/FRONT 3/2

k – only obstruent!  
i, e - only front V!  
 only e in poem  
 Vowels: i, u<sup>2</sup>, e, a

[perhaps better than “old”: timeless, aboriginal, formed by nature, undisturbed]

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Line 1<sub>CICADA</sub>: [ [Σ<sub>1</sub> Σ<sub>2</sub> Σ<sub>3</sub> ]<sub>A</sub> Σ<sub>4</sub> ]<sub>N</sub> Σ<sub>5</sub> ]<sub>NP</sub> 3 dental fricatives!!

NML Kireiji

si zu ka    sa    ya  
 ↓ H-I-G-H    L—O—W  
 FRONTB—A—C—K  
 “still”    “-ness”    !  
 [perhaps: unmoved]

BACK(80%)/FRONT 3/2

k-only obstruent!  
stop  
 i – only front V!  
 Vowels: i, u, a<sup>3</sup>  
 No nasals

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Line 2<sub>FROG</sub>: [[Σ<sub>1</sub> Σ<sub>2</sub> Σ<sub>3</sub> ]<sub>N(P)</sub> [ v [Σ<sub>4</sub> Σ<sub>5</sub> ]<sub>Va</sub> [Σ<sub>6</sub> Σ<sub>7</sub> ]<sub>Vb</sub> ]<sub>V(P)</sub> ]<sub>SENTENCE</sub>

First mentions of the two repeating syllables: zu & to

BACK(83%)/FRONT: 6/i!!!

ka wa zu    to bi    ko mu  
 B—A—C—K    HIGH    B—A—C—K  
 “frog”    “jump”    “be included”  
 (A) frog jump(s) in

Vowels: i, u<sup>2</sup>, o<sup>2</sup>, a<sup>2</sup>

Line 2<sub>CICADA</sub>: [[[Σ<sub>1</sub> Σ<sub>2</sub> ]<sub>N</sub> Σ<sub>3</sub> ]<sub>PP</sub> [[Σ<sub>4</sub> Σ<sub>5</sub> ]<sub>Va</sub> [Σ<sub>6</sub> Σ<sub>7</sub> ]<sub>Vb</sub> ]<sub>V</sub> ]<sub>VP</sub> Only 1 fricative!!

Particle

i wa    ni    si mi    i ru    Vowels: i<sup>5</sup>, u, a  
 HIGH (83%!!!)/LOW  
 ↓ BACK(17%)/FRONT 6/i  
 “stone”    “into”    “seep”    “enter”  
 seep(s) into (the) stone

2 nasals: ni . . . mi

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Line 3<sub>FROG</sub>: [Σ<sub>1</sub> Σ<sub>2</sub> ]<sub>N</sub> Σ<sub>3</sub>    [Σ<sub>4</sub> Σ<sub>5</sub> ]<sub>N</sub>

Particle

mi zu    no    o to    Vowels: i, u, o<sup>3</sup>  
 BACK(80%)/FRONT: 4/i    FRONT B—A—C—K  
 “water”    ’s    “sound”  
 (the) sound of (the) water

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Line 3<sub>CICADA</sub>: [Σ<sub>1</sub> Σ<sub>2</sub> ]<sub>N</sub> Σ<sub>3</sub>    [Σ<sub>4</sub> Σ<sub>5</sub> ]<sub>N</sub>

Particle

se mi    no    ko e    2 nasals: mi no  
 MID HIGH M—I—D  
 “cicada”    ’s    “voice”  
 (the) voice of (the) cicada

## COMBINED TEMPLATE

Line 1<sub>Combined</sub>:            [[A  $\Sigma_1$   $\Sigma_2$   $\Sigma_3$   $\Sigma_4$  ]<sub>N</sub>  $\Sigma_5$  ]<sub>NP</sub>  
kireiji

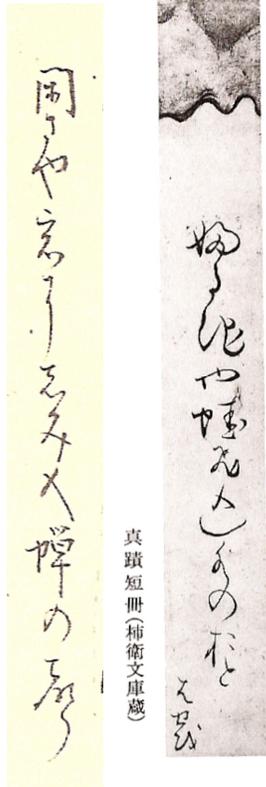
high high  
 ... one [i] ...    high[k]-high

Line 2<sub>Combined</sub>:            [  $\Sigma_1$   $\Sigma_2$   $\Sigma_3$  ]<sub>Nominal</sub> [ V [  $\Sigma_4$   $\Sigma_5$  ]<sub>Va</sub> [  $\Sigma_6$   $\Sigma_7$  ]<sub>Vb</sub> ] ]<sub>V(P)</sub>

MULTIPLE PARSSES BECOME AVAILABLE – LINE 2 BECOMES AMBIGUOUS:

In KAWAZU, we don't know whether line 2 is a sentence by itself, or a relative clause on *mizu*, or a complement clause on *oto*.

In SEMI, we don't know what the subject of *simiiru* is – the stillness, or the voice of the cicada.



## Shared Morae Patterns

Because the rhyme scheme of *haiku* is based on morae, it is important to pay as much attention to morae as to individual phonemes. There are many mora tokens shared by both poems, or used more than once in the same text. No more than 5 morae in each poem are shared. Having about 70 % of the morae being shared or doubled (a mora that is repeated within one of the texts) in each poem may imply that Bashō described a similar theme consciously or subconsciously by “playing with” these shared morae.

**Table 2: Shared Morae**

Line	Text 1	Shared	Double	Lonely	Text 2	S	D	L
1	ふるいけや hu-ru-i-ke ya	るいや [ru] [i] [ya]		ふけ [hu] [ke]	しずかさや si-zu-ka-sa ya	ずかや [zu] [ka] [ya]	し [si]	さ [sa]
2	かわずとびこむ ka-wa-zu to-bi-ko-mu	かわずこ [ka] [wa] [zu] [ko]	ずと [zu] [to]	びむ [bi] [mu]	いわにしみいる i-wa ni si-mi-i-ru	わみる [wa] [mi] [ru]	しみい [si] [mi] [i]	に [ni]
3	みずのおと mi-zu no o-to	みずの [mi] [zu] [no]	ずと [zu] [to]	お [o]	せみのこえ se-mi no ko-e	みのこ [mi] [no] [o]	み [mi]	せえ [se] [e]
	Text 1		E.g.		Text 2		E.g.	
	Shared	8			Shared	7		
	Double	1(x2)	と		Double	1(x2)	し	
	Sh&Do	1(x2)	ず		Sh&Do	2(x2)	みい	
	Lonely	5			Lonely	4		
	TOTAL	17			TOTAL	17		

There are more than two dozens words which could be made up with the use of shared morae; however, we think that the most notable ones are the following four: three nouns, *ka-wa-zu* (‘frog’), *mi-zu* (‘water’) and *i-wa* (‘rock’), and one verb, *i-ru* (‘enter’). The first poem has the two nouns, *ka-wa-zu* (‘frog’) and *mi-zu* (‘water’), both ending with the same mora, [zu], whereas the second poem has the noun and the verb, *i-wa* (‘rock’) and *i-ru* (‘enter’), both beginning with the same mora, [i], as shown in the following figure.

## Figure 1: Key Words, Spelled in the Shared Morae

### Text 1

ふる池や *huru+ike* *ya* old+pond ah!  
 ふ る い け や

蛙飛込 *kawazu* *tobi+komu* frog jump+be-included  
 か わ ず と び こ む

水のおと *mizu* *no* *oto* water 's sound  
 み ず の お と

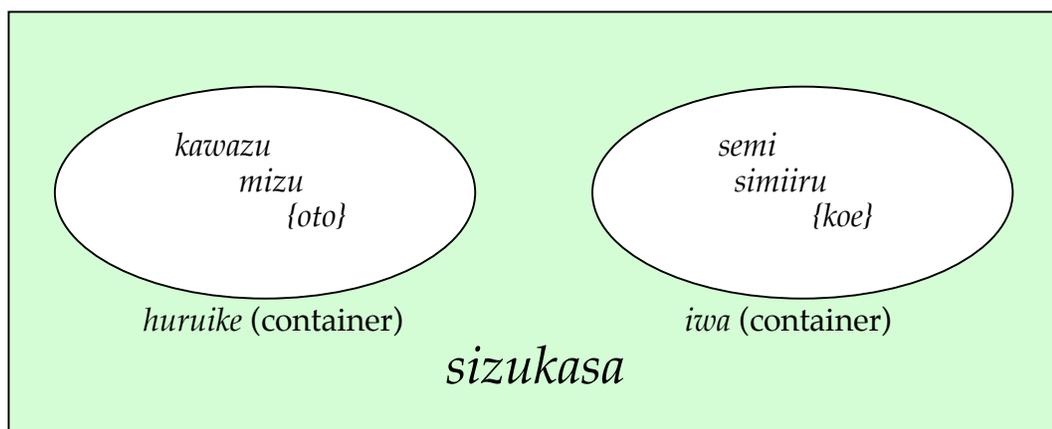
### Text 2

閑さや *sizuka+sa* *ya* still+ness ah!  
 し ず か さ や

岩にしみ入 *iwa* *ni* *simi+iru* rock into seep+enter  
 い わ に し み いる

蝉の聲 *semi* *no* *koe* cicada 's voice  
 せ み の こ え

It should also be noted that the shared morae in these four key words, [i], [ka], [zu], and [mi], appear in part in the following words: *hu-ru-i-ke* ('old+pond'), *si-zu-ka-sa* ('still+ness'), *si-mi* ('seep') and *se-mi* ('cicada'), all of which are also important items in the poems.



R. H. Blyth in *Haiku* (1952):

**"Haiku shows us what we knew all the time, but did not know we knew; it shows us that we are poets in so far as we live at all."**

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