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Sources of Readerly Attention in English-Language Haiku: An Exploratory Study

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Given that attention is an internal process that is hard to observe and the same term "attention" is used to refer to a wide range of experiences and situations, defining the concept of readerly attention poses even more challenges to scholars and educators. Humanities and Social Science researchers have been exploring the mechanisms of readers' attention by exposing them to narratives and conventional poetry. In this research-oriented presentation, three main sources of readerly attention in contemporary English-language haiku, a genre of short-form poetry, will be discussed: brevity, natural imagery, and juxtaposition. The sources of readerly attention were identified through a cognitive stylistic analysis of textual features of English-language haiku, supplemented by findings of a reader-response study carried out in the Japanese university setting. This exploratory research has shown that the extreme brevity of English-language haiku is a significant source of readerly attention in this genre of poetry. Simple natural imagery expressed in English-language haiku through common language facilitates the embodiment of readerly attention and is decoded by the reader more automatically, freeing the capacity for performing more cognitively demanding tasks, such as construing the overall meaning of a poem. Constructing the global meaning of an English-language haiku poem is heavily dependent on processing the 'cut', a conceptual gap between images, also known as juxtaposition. The technique of juxtaposition defamiliarizes the relationship between images encountered in English-language haiku, making it another powerful attention-grabber.

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