Robert Panara Haiku Contest at NTID and TCT

Midori MATSUFUJI

General Education, Tsukuba College of Technology

Abstract: In 2001, a haiku contest was held at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in America, and the Tsukuba College of Technology in Japan. It was held to celebrate the 80th birthday of an outstanding Deaf poet, Robert F. Panara, a professor at NTID. This article is written to report the background, the procedure, the result and the future of the contest with its effects. The very unique point of this contest is the way of its presentation. The poems of the winners were expressed not only in written words but also in sign-mime and were presented through telecommunication technology and are still seen on a web page. The contest showed the potential of high technology for cultural development of the Deaf.

Key Words: haiku, poem, sign-mime, technology

Panara and Haiku

Robert F. Panara (1921-) was the first Deaf professional to join the faculty of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), one of eight colleges of Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), in 1967. He helped establish NTID’s English Department and organized the NTID Drama Club. He is a poet, and used haiku in his teaching of English to Deaf students. He also served as a faculty fellow at the summer school program of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) from 1967 to 1983, and there he began using haiku in the sign-mime workshop. Sign-mime is a combination of sign, a systematic body language, and mime, non-systematic body movement. NTD has featured mime as the basis of their dramatic performance. Mime has become a part of NTD’s performances and workshops, and thus a part of American Deaf Culture. In American Deaf Culture, haiku and sign-mime are linked very closely and have more than 30 years’ history. “Sign Mime & Creative Movement” is an official credited humanities course at NTID. This course is taught as a workshop and focuses on the dominant historical form of expression used by theatres of the Deaf. Topics include principles for the effective use of space, creative movement strategies, and expression of original ideas in sign-mime.

“The uses of sign-mime can be exploited to help Deaf students visualize the image, creating the necessary ‘picture in the mind,’” Robert Panara said when explaining how to express a haiku in mime. “This can be done by joining the tips of the thumb and forefingers outstretched and spaced an “O,” keeping the last three fingers outstretched and spaced apart. By fluttering the hand in the air, one can imitate the butterfly’s flight — just as the great French mime, Marcel Marceau, popularized it on the stage. Also, it pantomimes the act of “sewing” — literally stitching the stalks of barley together while simultaneously imitating a butterfly fluttering in the air.” Thus, a
Haiku contest

Jerome Cushman, a hearing professor of Performing Arts at NTID, proposed a haiku contest for students at NTID/RIT and Tsukuba College of Technology (TCT), its sister institution in Japan. In 1974 he began teaching dance and theatre courses to Deaf college students at NTID. This was the year that the Experimental Educational Theatre, now renamed Robert Panara Theatre, was opened. The NTID Theatre Department has a rich heritage of offering challenging, entertaining, and provocative works of theatre, all created for both Deaf and hearing audiences. It has produced work in a wide variety of theatre styles, including comedy, musical, dance, drama, classical, Kabuki (Japanese), experimental, and puppet, and has produced new works by both Deaf and hearing authors. One of the first performances Cushman saw presented by the Deaf student actors was “Haiku Harvest” which had been created and directed by Robert F. Panara. Jerome Cushman has directed more than 20 performances for the theatre. He greatly respects Panara and said that he would like to celebrate his 80th birthday in 2001.

In March 2001, Cushman wrote a mail to Matsufuji, an English teacher at TCT, to discuss this plan. His idea was to encourage students in both countries to share their poems in English, Japanese, and in both sign languages —NS (Nihon Shuwa) and ASL (American Sign Language). TCT has instituted a Tanka contest of its own as part of the Japanese course activities for freshmen, so having students write haiku was not an unfamiliar concept. However, TCT has no courses on tradition of performing arts. Nevertheless, TCT decided to accept the proposal and conduct a haiku contest. The two college’s contests were administrated separately because the academic schedules of the two institutes differed.

Students at NTID entered their works in the contest on these conditions:
*Write an original haiku on the general topic of “spring” or “no sound”.
*Follow the rules of haiku:
  3 short lines; about 17 syllables long in total; in Japanese — 5 syllables, 7 syllables and 5 syllables; in English — the syllables may vary, but short line, longer line, short line; based on an experience related to nature and the human condition; write about a specific snapshot that shows a comparison of 2 ideas and conveys the emotions in one event; avoid using “I” — be objective; avoid using “like” or “as”; Anita Virgil says haiku creates “moments of special awareness that give one pause in the everyday world, make one feel the wonder of the ordinary seen anew.”
*Deadline is April 15 at 6:00 p.m.
*Cash Prizes for the top five poems as selected by 3 judges. ($100, $50, $25, $10, $10)

About 35 participants wrote around 60 poems. The judging was completed at the
Students at TCT submitted their works in the contest in Japanese. The deadline was May 23 because new classes started in mid-April. The selection was done by Miyoko Hosoya, a teacher of Japanese, Midori Matsufuji, a teacher of English, and Vice President Kazusuke Okiyoshi, who was a member of a haiku society named "Hototogisu." On June 19, the three TCT judges selected 10 poems as excellent out of a total of 69. After the selection, the winners tried to translate their poems into English. Opinions were exchanged between the students and the English teacher on
English translation. Cushman made suggestions on how to make the poems more colloquial in American English. On September 3, the winners gathered and saw the web page through the Real Player on the computer, in which American students expressed their works as sign-mimes. The Japanese students were then told to prepare their own sign-mime presentations of their works. Their presentations of combination of American signs and mime were video-taped, and the tape was sent to NTID through the internet and transferred onto a web page by the technical staff at NTID.

At the ceremony
At the same time, the Postsecondary Education Network International (PEN-International) was being established under the leadership of NTID. This network is an international partnership of colleges and universities serving the postsecondary education needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Web technology, faculty training, telecommunications technology, information technology and instructional technology are being used to improve teaching and learning, to increase the application of innovative technology to teaching, and to expand career opportunities for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people. The Nippon Foundation in Japan is partnering with NTID in the USA and TCT in Japan to establish the network. The Nippon Foundation awarded NTID $911,700 to underwrite the first year of a five-year $6.17 million project. PEN-International was glad to serve as the sponsor of the Robert Panara Haiku Contest, and in conjunction with this sponsorship, the possibility of using web technology and telecommunications technology added to the contest.

On the morning of the 1st of October, TCT celebrated the opening of the PEN-International Lab by inviting Dr. Robert Davila, the vice president of RIT for NTID and Dr. James DeCaro, the director of PEN-International. The three top winners at NTID and the two top winners at TCT exchanged their works through the brand new facilities at the lab. Panara himself appeared on the screen to greet TCT. He presented two of his haiku poems, which he chose because it was morning in Japan and evening in America.

Early morning light  
brightening the summer day —  
a sunflower smiles!

Evening sunset  
darkening the summer sky —  
a sunflower sleeps.

The top three poems at NTID were presented, beginning with the students who tied for second place following by the 1st place winner. Each student introduced him or herself and then presented their winning haiku.

Second place (Tie)  
Rita DeSarkar
tossed in the ocean
a written note that says
"forget me not"

Sam Sepah

impudent clouds wail
scattering tears everywhere
mother earth grows green

First Place
Jessica McKinney

memory’s ashes
drift softly into a fast river
full of life

Then two of the winners at TCT presented their haiku to the audience in the lab, which included Davila, DeCaro and many faculty members from TCT, as well as the camera that transmitted the picture across the Pacific Ocean to the USA using the teleconference system.

Second Place
TAKEISHIMA Eri

oh, please ears
let me hear the true voices
of my dear parents

First Place
OHTA Yoshihiro
taking off the hearing aid
I stand alone on the mound
to pitch, concentrating

In a question to the top Japanese winner, and American student asked:
"Are there any professional Deaf baseball players in Japan?"
The Japanese student replied, "No, we have no Deaf player."
"Would you like to be the first?" the American student asked.
"No, I wouldn't, Ohta replied. "This poem is not about myself but about my friend. He said he would like to be."
"Is your friend Deaf?" the American student asked.
"Yes, he is," replied Ohta.
Panara, who is a baseball enthusiast, then talked about Dummy Hoy, a professional Deaf baseball player, who invented the gestures for umpires such as strike, out and safe.

This opening ceremony was reported in a newspaper with a photograph of Ohta signing his poem. We can see their works at http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/haiku/tcthaiku.shtml.

Cushman visited TCT

In October, Jerome Cushman himself came to TCT and gave a lecture on "using poetry in teaching Deaf students" as an invited lecturer for the Japan-America Symposium held at TCT. He discussed haiku and Deaf poets in Japan and in America, including Sugiyama Sampu and Murakami Kijo. The haiku was born in Japan in the fourteenth century. In the seventeenth century, Matsuo Basho established the haiku as a poetic form. Sugiyama Sampu was one of his disciples and was said to be a patron. He was a rich merchant and a Deaf poet living in Edo. Murakami Kijo (1865-1938)
was also a Deaf poet in Japan. He had strong sympathy with Sampu and studied him. Cushman’s discussion of haiku and Deaf people amazed the Japanese audience. “Our Deaf students have something worth while to say and they will say it if they have the encouragement and the opportunity,” he said in his lecture, and this comment moved the faculty members at TCT very much. It was a very new viewpoint to them. He closed his lecture by citing his top student’s haiku, noting that her poem acquired layers of meaning regarding the tragedy in New York on September 11, though it was made before the events.3)

During Cushman’s stay at TCT, the students gave a welcome party for him, and he gave a workshop during the party, teaching them how to express their poems in sign-mime. He let the authors improvise their own poems and let the students discuss them and help each other to produce a better work. It was a very good opportunity for the students to be taught by the qualified teacher of sign-mime. TCT needs such a teacher.

Next contest

The president of the Nippon Foundation who attended the opening ceremony at TCT was pleased to see the presentation of haiku by the students in Japan and in America. He agreed to continue the haiku contest as a part of the PEN-International activities.

NTID will hold the next Haiku Contest in the Winter Quarter of 2002. NTID faculty announced it in classes and held workshops for the first 3 weeks of December. The deadline for the poems will be January 21, 2002 and the Grand Prize Winner will be selected by February 1, with three Awards of Merit. The prizes will be $500 for the top winner and $100 for the three other winners. The prizes, therefore, are bigger this year. In the Spring Quarter the faculty will encourage students in the various art and design areas--painting, drawing, ceramics, photography, graphic design, fabric/weaving, glass, jewelry, furniture, essay writing, dance/choreography, sign mime, etc.--to use the winning haiku as a source or as inspiration to create a work of art that is related to it, and they will then be judged and awarded prizes in the same amounts--$500 for the top winner and three $100 prizes for Awards of Merit. Pen-International will sponsor the prize money and will give the judges a $200 honorarium.

TCT will hold the contest only on literature in the first trimester of 2002.

Though the haiku originated in Japan, it is becoming popular in many other countries. American teachers consider it to be useful in teaching students to understand literature and express themselves. The interaction between American and Japanese Deaf students through haiku will help to develop their cultures.

References
3) Cushman, J.: The Use of Poetry in Teaching Deaf Students: Presentation to Tsukuba college of Technology, 2001