

Spoken Language in Motion: Acquiring German Basic Rhythm and Dynamic Stress through Haiku and Tanka

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A Work in Progress Report

When learning a Germanic language like German one of the fundamental issues in terms of Spoken Language¹ production and performance is that of rhythm, and of the syllable as its constituent discreet rhythmical unit. If and where the learner's native language (L1) happens to have a fundamentally diverging rhythmic base, acquiring the skill to at least be able to recognise a syllable in the target language (TL) German is of the utmost importance – even more so than in cases where a learner from her/his L1 is already familiar with the concept of syllables and merely needs to acquire the new TL rules for identifying syllables – and here most importantly syllable boundaries. Ideally, the skill of producing an utterance in the TL by correctly weighting and reducing syllables and by applying deliberate overall phrasal stress is also acquired in the process. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Although, Stock & Veličkova (2002, pp. 300f) put a new critical perspective on the research of the feature rhythm in stress timing languages, the importance of reductions and phrasal stress are thoroughly highlighted by them.

If pronunciation is targeted at all, this is often done so by addressing the production of solely the phoneme inventory. Regularly, learners are also confronted too early with highly complex presentation tasks that go too far too soon and ask too much of the learner all at once (Stöver-Blahak, 2012, pp. 72f). Regarding the phoneme inventory a lot of emphasis tends to be placed on consonantal phonemes and clusters. While by no means being unimportant, they are not the key to understanding and eventually mastering syllables (in context) in the TL German. Kohler (2000, p. 10) states: “The strictly linear segmental phonemic frame for phonological systematization has to be complemented with nonlinear componential features referring to any articulatory or phonatory aspect. This is mandatory [...]”

The syllable nucleus in German is by definition – according to written language standard – always a vowel. The reality is somewhat more complex, but it remains true that if a

¹ Spoken Language is here understood as fundamentally distinct from written standards. Spoken Language e.g. possesses its own aspects and principles of grammar (morphology, syntax etc.), which in turn need to be acquired by any learner of the language (Tannen, 1982, pp. 105ff).

learner cannot identify a syllable successfully s/he will almost certainly not be able to reproduce it either.

In contrast to the five distinct vowel sounds in Japanese, even standard varieties of German possess at least around 20 discreet vowel phonemes, including diphthongs. Dialects of German are often much richer still in terms of their vowel phoneme inventory. In addition to that, a distinction between short and long vowels is made. However, this is also true on a distinct level for Japanese as well (Albrecht & Lausch, 2004, p. 6).

From a more global language learning perspective, one might argue that speech production is much less important than passive skills like reading and listening comprehension, or written production. However, any kind of a remotely communicative approach in language teaching will have to tackle the issue of speech production. Naturally, the learner of any new TL, especially at early stages of the acquisition process, cannot embrace the entire complexity of the language all at once. This in turn does not mean learners should not at all be confronted with certain complexities. This is precisely where the expertise in the TL as well as the methodological and didactic capabilities of the teacher are called into effect (Stöver-Blahak, 2012, p. 72). This is of particular relevance, since for speech production and performance aspects of a stress timing language like German, a basic understanding of German syllable structure is required for any learner of the language.

The following report will showcase an example of how the concept of syllables may be practically introduced to learners at very early stages of their TL learning using the Japanese poetic forms of haiku and tanka for TL production. Principally, this is an approach that could be taken anywhere but one that possesses special relevance in the Japanese context for a number of reasons. Haiku and tanka are widely known poetic forms to students in Japan. Not every student will have written any her/himself, but they can be expected to be passively familiar with the poems and their structure. Haiku, when employed in syllable-based languages, have the following structure: 5 syllables in line one, 7 in line two, and again 5 in line three. Tanka follow the same pattern but add two more lines of 7 syllables each. In Japanese the smallest rhythmic unit is different, but that is of minor significance here. Its representation in syllable-based languages can only be syllabic. How the smallest Japanese rhythmic unit differs precisely from that of English or German will be briefly addressed under 2) below.

There are three distinct considerations for choosing this particular methodological approach in classes with first year ab initio learners of German at 愛知県立大学 (Aichi Prefectural University). Here is a rough sketch of the preliminary reasoning. This is to be followed by a more in depth discussion of the aspects in context below:

- 1) The course book chosen – *Und du? Sprechsituationen im Unterricht – NEU!* (Hopf & Vögel, 2012) – is characterised by a highly communicative approach bordering on pattern drills. It employs a method developed by Azra and Vannieuwenhuys (1999) for French teaching at Japanese universities, the *Méthode Immédiate*. The communicative approach is occasionally somewhat hampered by large and extensive vocabulary sections. The haiku/tanka approach

was picked in order to bridge the gap between practical-oriented, though somewhat limited, communicative patterns on the one hand and rather extensive lists of vocabulary on the other. By getting students to perform in class added onto by (homework) exercises producing haiku/tanka based on the respective course book unit vocabulary it was anticipated retention levels of the vocabulary would be higher (see Appendix A). After all, as most students and teachers of foreign languages alike will know lists are of little value unless the vocabulary in them is (somehow) being used productively and the new words and phrases (chunks) become relevant and thus in a manner of speaking are made to *come alive*.

- 2) The haiku/tanka approach was, furthermore, chosen in order to introduce students to the concept of syllables in German in a productive manner. It aims at highlighting in particular the striking differences to the Japanese mora (拍 or モーラ) system (Hirschfeld, 2011, pp.42f). The smallest rhythmical unit within the mora system always ends in a vowel (Albrecht & Lausch, 2004, pp. 3f). One exception being the letter ん (n), which can stand on its own and is always counted as a separate mora. And another the frequent doubling of consonants, as in 日本 (ni · p · po · n – alternatively pronounced ni · ho · n). Standard Japanese does not possess any two consecutive vowels produced as a diphthong. By definition, in spoken Japanese according to 標準語 (hyōjungo = standard Japanese) or 共通語 (kyōtsūgo = common language) the mora system always places a hiato to separate the two vowel sounds (Albrecht & Lausch, 2004, pp. 2, 6f). This may be exemplified by the monosyllabic 外 (realised as *ga · i* = foreign) or word final position in おめでとう (*o · me · de · to · u* = congratulation). These distinct patterns for marking the smallest rhythmic units very differently in either language has a number of repercussions onto how the learner approaches the spoken TL.
- 3) Lastly, the haiku/tanka approach is giving students hands on experience of aspects and principles of Spoken Language. In particular, students are introduced to some of the many and widely used modal particles and interjections in German and common (vowel) reductions in everyday conversational speech acts among native speakers – to a more limited extent this is even to be found in chat and message writing (Kohler, 2000). Spoken Language is in recent years receiving greater attention by researchers, teachers, and students alike. This is to some extent due to the advent of the Internet and Social Networking Services (SNS) where the facilitation of Spoken Language patterns and principles is becoming ever more widespread. The traditional language teaching classroom rarely offers any opportunities for students to engage with anything but the written standard language. Sadly, this is also true for activities actually focusing on speaking tasks. The result, written language orally performed badly cannot, however, be the goal in any even only remotely communicatively oriented classroom environment.

The classes in which the haiku/tanka writing approach has been used are extracurricular classes

with an emphasis on conversation and aspects of Spoken Language. These so-called iCoToBa² classes are taught alongside regular language classes at 愛知県立大学, some of which are also covering related content and types of activities. Students sign up for the classes on a voluntary basis. And while by far the majority is very keen and eager to study, what attracts them in the first place is the conversational focus of the classes. Students, unfortunately, rarely have much of an understanding of the distinctions between Spoken Language versus Written Language or even of that between everyday language and standard language.

As part of the グローバル人材育成推進事業 (Project for the Promotion of Global Human Resource Development) all iCoToBa classes are aimed at getting students ready for 21st Century international challenges and to prepare them in a practical fashion for study and other stays abroad. Consequently, the ability to communicate and especially to perform will be crucial on their path onto an ever more global stage. Thus, the learning of their TLs (here: German) cannot simply comprise of the grammar and vocabulary of the TL, spiced up with some lectures about certain aspects of TL culture, literature, history, society, law, economics etc. – often taught solely through the medium of the native Japanese. If students are to succeed in a TL environment they will also need to be able to orally perform in the TL in a fashion that smoothens communication. For stress timing languages like English or German, this means mastering dynamic phrasal stress in order to make what is being said more intelligible to the (native) listener (Hirschfeld, 2011, pp. 42f). For German Kohler (2000, p. 3) specifies this necessity: "Utterances set frames for phonetic flexibility of words in speech production, and words require utterance embedding to be perceived and understood appropriately." In order to achieve such mastery of TLs like English or German a learner needs to be able to determine stress targets and in particular s/he has to be able to (significantly) reduce unstressed parts of utterances. In accordance with the theme-rheme structure new (and important) information is highlighted, whereas large parts of the rest of the utterance have to be reduced in order to maintain intelligibility for the listener (Hunke, 2005, pp. 64ff). To enhance chances of students successfully acquiring such oral proficiency and performance skills alongside the more traditional language learning content, an early exposure to and active involvement with the constituent rhythmic sub units, syllables, is highly desirable. According to Hirschfeld (2011) Japanese learners habitually display weaknesses in that field. The speech of Japanese learners of English or German in the TL, particularly when presenting, often appears to be flat to the extent of even sounding like cases of bad speech synthesis.

In order to tackle the issue of rhythm head on utilising haiku and tanka in conjunction with the existent vocabulary – comprising also of meta language and useful chunks for basic everyday conversations – presented a very promising opportunity. Students were introduced to the haiku writing in the TL by reading and performing examples given by the teacher. They were asked to read out aloud the examples in groups and the listeners were instructed to clap for

²iCoToBa classes taught at 愛知県立大学 are covering the TLs Chinese, English, French, German, and Spanish.

every syllable heard while also counting the number of syllables in each line. The clapping stems from a method for pronunciation exercises that gained a degree of influence in the German as a Foreign Language classroom in the 1990s following Cauneau (1992). Clapping and syllable counting proved to be a little challenging for some students. The majority, however, managed the task without huge difficulty. Subsequently, the first haiku composition task was conducted in class and one additional haiku to be written as a homework task.

Haiku writing homework tasks were then set regularly every other week. In class the students would get ten minutes to work with their own compositions and to check them for too many or too few syllables, and ideally to repair them where and when necessary. Students were again required to read out aloud their own compositions and to clap and count at the same time. This step was skipped at later stages, in favour of the next step. Students' haiku compositions were passed around to other students, who then peer reviewed the haiku in the same fashion as described above. For this, 10-15 minutes were set aside. Sometimes the peer review was done in pairs, one student reciting the poem, the other clapping and counting. If there were any missing or superfluous syllables, repair suggestions were made in writing using a different colour pen. The haiku were then passed back to the authors, who spent another 5-10 minutes examining the feedback. Finally, the teacher for further comments and feedback collected the compositions. They were handed back the following week.

Theoretical concepts of syllables in German were not introduced at all in the very beginning of the project. Instead, students were asked to act on their own intuitive understanding of German. This approach was chosen deliberately. Students should *do* and *experience themselves* rather than *know about* abstract phenomena in the TL. This worked surprisingly well for the most part. Only a few weeks later in week 5, students were given a simplified introduction to the make up of syllables in German. The main focus in this was on identifying the vowel. Cases of consecutive vowels and final -n represented the most apparent hurdles for students. Where students continuously had problems – largely due to interference from the written form and not inability to orally produce the language content – they used their own speaking command of the TL to compare.

The initial exercises eliciting and practising the vocabulary were always driven by the communicative pattern variation approach of the course book. However, in these exercises it was found not all vocabulary could be covered meaningfully or often enough to trigger a higher likelihood of retention. The haiku (and tanka) writing and oral performance tasks were found to be valuable additions in terms of creative and engaging activities, clearly benefitting especially the acquisition of chunk structures, like *Guten Tag!* or *Auf Wiedersehen!*

The results of the haiku and tanka writing are very intriguing indeed. Students are showing a very high grasp of a larger part of the vocabulary covered, especially of the chunks. What proved to be somewhat more difficult were modal particles and interjections and here especially the question where to place them within an utterance. The rules for using these in Spoken Language German are, however, nothing but enormously complex.

Appendices B and C illustrate some of the compositions created as part of the project.

While far from all being “perfect” renderings of the TL German, they showcase extraordinary levels of creativity and dedication in engaging with the poems (cf. also Finch, 2003, pp. 29f). Purposefully included are some examples where the syllable count does not add up correctly or, although it does, language aspects could be improved upon. The latter illustrates an important aspect of the haiku/tanka training: in order to engage with the poetry format complete mastery of the language material is not an absolute requirement. In a workshop for foreign language teachers at the JALT OLE SIG’s 2nd annual conference at 中京大学 (Chukyo University) in Nagoya, the exercise was successfully simulated even with participants who had no command of the German language at all. A basic notion of rhythmical patterns in the TL suffices. Students within the project, in turn, were observed to largely be striving to produce lines containing the appropriate number of syllables and (!) to write meaningfully. It appears thus that using haiku and tanka can be a very useful means to teaching a foreign language to Japanese students.

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Appendix A

Und du? Vocabulary lists units 1-4

Ah, ...	ああ、なるほど。
Alles klar!	大丈夫だよ!
Alphabet, das	アルファベット
Auf Wiedersehen!	さようなら!
bis ...	～まで
Bis dann!	じゃ、またね!
Bis nächste Woche!	また来週!
Bitte, bitte!	どういたしまして。
buchstabieren + 4格	スペルを言う
Danke!	ありがとう!
das	これ、それ
Dialog, der, -e	会話
du	君
ein	不定冠詞 (英: a)
er	彼
es	それ (英: it)
Entschuldigung!	すみません!
Eszett/scharfes s	[ß] (ドイツ語の特殊文字)
Grammatik, die (nur im Singular)	文法 (単数形のみ)
grüßen	あいさつする
Guten Tag!	こんにちは! (丁寧)
Hallo!	こんにちは! (インフォーマル)
heißen	～という、～と呼ばれている
ich	私
Ich bin ...	私は～だ。
Ich heiße ...	私は～と言うの。
ihr	あなたたち、君たち
Ja.	はい。(英: Yes.)
man	人は (不特定の人)
nächst-	次の、来～
Name, der, -n	名前
schreiben + 4格	書く
sein + 1格	～である、～だ
sie	①彼女、②彼 (女)ら
Sie	あなた (丁寧)
Tschüss!	バイバイ! じゃあね!
Umlaut, der, -e	ウムラウト (Ä, Ö, Üドイツ語の特殊文字)
und	そして、～と
Und du?	君は?
Vielen Dank!	どうもありがとうございます!
Vorname, der, -n	名前 (名字に対する)、ファーストネーム
Wie bitte?	(話を聞き取れなかったときに) もう一度おねがいします。何ですって?
Wie?	どう?
Wie heißt du?	君は何と言うの?
wir	私たち
Woche, die, -n	週

Das ist ...	それは～です。
denn	(文尾) の (今どこで住んでいるの?) 質問をやわらげる働きをする)
in	(地名、場所) で/に
jetzt	今
nicht	～ない (英: not)
Wo?	どこ?
wohnen	住む

auch	～も
aus	～から
Deutschland	ドイツ
Japan	日本
kennen + 4格	知っている
kommen (aus + 地名)	来る、～出身である
Nein.	いいえ。(英: No.)
Nein, noch nie gehört.	いや、聞いたことがない。
nicht	～ない (英: not)
Österreich	オーストリア
Schweiz, die (aus der Schweiz)	スイス (スイスから)
Woher?	どこから?

Ach so!	ああ、そうなんだ。 なるほど!
Adresse, die, -n	住所
Anmeldung, die, -n	届け出、登録
Alter, das	年齢
auf (Deutsch)	(ドイツ語) で
Datum, das	日付
Deutsch	ドイツ語
Englisch	英語
E-Mail-Adresse, die, -n	メールアドレス
Familienname, der, -n	姓
Nachname, der, -n	姓
Formular, das, -e	申請書、書類
Geburtsdatum, das, -daten	生年月日
Geburtsort, der, -e	出生地
Geschlecht, das, -er	性別
Handynummer, die, -n	携帯番号
heißen	～と言う意味である、 ～と言う
Japanisch	日本語
männlich	男性の
Matrikelnummer, die, -n	学籍番号
Ort, der, -e	場所、現地
Postleitzahl, die, -en	郵便番号
Studienfach, das, -fächer	(大学の) 専攻科目
Telefonnummer, die, -n	電話番号
Unterschrift, die, -en	サイン
verstehen	分かる、理解する
Verstehe.	分かる、分かった。
Vorname, der, -n	名前 (名字に対する)、 ファーストネーム
weiblich	女性の
Wohnort, der, -e	居住地 (書類上で用いられる)

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Appendix B

Week 3: haiku

Hallo! Ich heiÙe Tim.
Ich komme aus Deutschland. Und du?
Ich bin aus der Schweiz.

Wo wohnst sie denn?
Sie wohnt in Nagoya.
Kennst du Nagoya?
Ja.

5. Wo wohnen sie denn?
7. Sie wohnen in Japan jetzt.
5. Ah, ... Vielen Dank! Tschüss!

Guten Tag. Ich heiÙe ai. Ich mag tennis und Essen. Freut mich!

5. Wo wohnen sie denn Herr...?
7. Albert. Ich wohne in Österreich.
5. Ah. Ich kenne da. Tschüss!

Week 7: haiku and tanka

5. Was machst du gerne?
7. Ich sehe sehr gern Fußball
5. Ich spiele auch gern.
7. Und selbst? Ich höre Musik
7. Ich höre gern klassische.

5. Was lernen Sie jetzt?
7. Ich lerne Italienisch.
5. Das ist sehr einfach.

Ich spreche Deutsch.
Es macht viel Spaß denn.
Und du? Was sprichst du?
Ich spreche Russisch und Deutsch.
Und ich lerne jetzt Spanisch.

Was machst du gerne?
Ich mache gern mit Freunden Sport.
Das mache ich auch gern.
Und ich mache auch Musik.
Oh, toll! Was spielst du gerne?

Guten Tag! Heute,
wie ist das Wetter? Heute
Es ist Regen dann.

Es ist Sommer denn.
Ich möchte die See gehen.
und möchte spielen.

5. Ich mag Film sehen.
7. Ich mag auch. Mit mir,
seh. Film.

5. Gute Idee! Sch. jetzt!

Appendix C

<u>Further student haiku/tanka</u>			
Was machst du gerne?	5	Ich höre musik	5
Ich gehe gern mit Freunden.	7	Ich höre am liebsten Rock	7
Was hörst du gerne?	5	lieber popmusik	5
Ich höre am liebsten Jazz.	7	frühstücke das brot	5
Kannst du gut Klavier spielen?	7	aber lieber reic essen	7
		Ich spiele Sport nach	5
Wie findest du Deutsch?	5		
Nicht so besonders. Und du?	7	<i>Was machst du gern?</i>	4
Es ist <i>int(e)ressant</i> .	5	Ich liebe das Fußballspiel.	7
		<i>Spiel du Fußball?</i>	4
Ich mache sport gern.	5		
Echt?! Sport mache ich auch gern.	7	Was machst du gerne	5
Dann spielst du Fußball?	5	Ich spiele gern Instruments	7
Nein, ich spiele Fußball nicht.	7	zum Beispiel Geige,	5
Spielst du? Ja, ich spiele gern.	7	Trompete, Pauke, Fagott ...	7
		<i>kulassischeMusik liebeich 9</i>	