

Teaching and Learning Photo-Haiku in English on a Remote Island

David McMurray

The teaching and learning of haiku in English takes place in more than 70 countries, including the far reaches of the world. This article documents how haiku in English was taught on a remote Japanese island. Innovative ways to teach haiku and photo-haiku in English on Amami Oshima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture are presented and discussed. A new word game was piloted and tested to check on the learners' understanding of photo-haiku. Examples of the learning results of these online teaching techniques are shared.

Introduction

Teaching and learning haiku in English connects the world. Public school curricula in Japan formally includes the vernacular study of haiku in Junior High School classrooms. In the United Kingdom, the teaching of haiku has been regularly documented since 1987 in national curriculum set for pupils aged between ten and thirteen at the key stage 3 level (Great Britain Inspectorate of Schools, 1987; Ofsted, 2007). Haiku has been taught in English in Canada as a lesson component in the subject of social studies. Ediger (1993) reported that one of the earliest examples of teaching a series of haiku lessons confirmed that sixth grade elementary school pupils in Ontario were motivated to enjoy and write haiku poetry.

First, the student teacher read three haikus aloud. After discovering the characteristics of a haiku from two models the class as a whole wrote haiku based on picture slides from a unit of their social studies textbook. Next, students wrote a haiku in large groups, and then with a peer. Finally, students wrote haikus as a homework challenge, and 22 of 25 students brought their poems to class the next day. Writing haikus can be one means of having learners develop their own ideas and put them into print (Ediger, 1993, p. 42).

Universities in Japan (e.g., Hokusei Gakuen University, Kagawa University, The International University of Kagoshima) and America (Millikin University) have included haiku courses in their offerings to undergraduates for more than two decades. According to the Japan Times (2001), the program offered at the International University of Kagoshima was the first in Japan:

Lectures for the haiku program will be held for students in the department on a weekly basis for 13 weeks. While participants focus on composing haiku in the classroom...outside locations that might inspire them to write ... gain an understanding of word rhythm through their compositions and become accustomed to English usage (Japan Times, 2001).

In New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington offers undergraduate degrees in creative writing and post-graduate haiku research opportunities. In the University of Canberra hosts community events for writing haiku. There are also several hundred haiku groups in Japan such as the HIA (Haiku International Association)

Keywords: photo-haiku, haiku, comparative culture, English education, Amami Oshima

whose members teach and learn haiku by holding regular conferences and contests for their one million members. The British Haiku Society based in London and the American Haiku Society publish journals, host conferences and organize contests for their members. These groups were created to foster their members' education, publications, and social contacts. The Haiku Foundation in the Commonwealth of Virginia uniquely launches projects to foster haiku. It does this by providing online access for anyone interested in learning how to read, write, and discuss haiku. In addition, NIE (Newspapers in English) haiku columns in the *Asahi Shimbun* and *The Mainichi* have been educating their seven million readers for years. Haiku contests organized by businesses and governments regularly attract participants young and old. For example, participants in the Golden Triangle Haiku Contest (2022) based in Washington, D.C. represented 71 countries, 49 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The farthest submissions came from halfway around the globe in Australia and Indonesia. All ages took part in the contest, with nearly 300 young people in elementary, middle, or high schools submitting haiku.

The field of haiku education is wide and there are many faces in the crowd according to this haiku.

sepia photo

all the faces we once knew

flowers with no names

The Problem of Teaching Haiku on a Remote Island in Japan

The island campus project, "Teaching and Learning English Haiku on Amami Oshima" was started in October, 2021 as a research project with the goal of contributing to the tourism industry on remote islands. To support Amami's tourism industry from the ground up in a sustainable way, the island campus project was designed to encourage students to take pride in their island by conveying the unique fauna, flora, and cultural resources of their island through English haiku.

Concomitantly in November, 2021 a photo-haiku contest was organized for junior and senior high school students by The International University of Kagoshima for the first time. This served as a pilot project to observe whether there would be sufficient student interest in haiku composed in English at high schools on remote islands. In all, 47 schools located in Kagoshima Prefecture participated, including Amami High School and Oshima Kita High School. Students submitted a surprisingly high number of well-written entries: 2,442 photo-haiku. The high scores obtained by a majority of the 30 students who volunteered to play the game in English indicated they were keen haiku poets and that the piloted game had potential for use in the island campus research project. Contest-winning high school student participants were able to successfully publish their haiku in the *Minami Nippon* newspaper as well as the *Asahi Shimbun* (McMurray, 2022).

Here is an example of an islander haiku by Hanamoe Namiki who participated in making Amami-style New Year's fish soup in a home economics class held last December at Oshima Kita High School. That same month she won a local newspaper prize for this delicious-smelling haiku entered into a contest organized by the International University of Kagoshima (McMurray, 2022).

grandmother braises the chicken
praying for a newborn baby
a starry night

A university student who was born on Amami-Oshima, Aoi Ikeda, heard in January, 2022 that she had won a prize for an aromatic haiku entered into an international haiku contest organized by Akita University in Akita Prefecture.

Autumn breeze and
under the persimmon tree
cool of the evening

Background

Japan's southern island of Amami Oshima was registered as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site in July, 2021. This listing protects the property. For example, a key threat to the site was identified as the impact from tourism. Prior to the pandemic, the tourism industry had increased, therefore sustainable levels of tourism were fully assessed and continuously monitored to prevent over-tourism. An uninhabited site recommended for preservation, Mount Yuwandake on Amami-Oshima Island rises 694 metres above sea level, is home to endemic plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, inland water fish and decapod crustaceans, including the endangered Amami rabbit (*Pentalagus furnessi*) and the endangered Ryukyu long-haired rat (*Diplothrix legata*) that represent ancient lineages and have no living relatives anywhere in the world. These species, designated by Japan as national natural treasures, only inhabit Amami-Oshima and Tokunoshima islands in Kagoshima Prefecture, and the northern part of Okinawa Prefecture's main island. The geographic designation by UNESCO of the World Natural Heritage Site was one of the joyous events in the history of Kagoshima prefecture, and was proof that the unique nature of Amami Oshima had been recognized by UNESCO representatives from around the world (Figures 6 and 7).

Methodology

Keeping in mind that the climate of the mainland island of Kyushu and subtropical rainforests of Amami Oshima are different, even within Kagoshima prefecture, the project envisioned in advance to think about the contents that might inspire junior high school students in Amami Oshima.

Important to this research is the keyword of *shima*. Usually translated as "island," the term refers to the idea of village or community. There are unique languages, songs, foods, festivals, and other social differences between the people living on the mainland of Kagoshima and those living on Amami Oshima. Shimayumuta, a Ryukyuan language differs from the Satsugu dialect, a Kagoshima dialect. In the Amami dialect, shima (島) has a narrower meaning than "island" and refers to one's hometown or *kyori* (郷里) (Hayward and Kuwahara, 2008; Peters, 2011). As a further example related to haiku, the Tokyo standard word *ore* (おれ) meaning "me," is an expression more commonly pronounced by both men and women of all ages in Kagoshima in the

Satsugu dialect as *oi* (おい) or (俺). Tea, or *ocha* (お茶) is grown in Chiran and Kirishima, Kagoshima Prefecture for the Itoen company's *Oi Ocha* brand. Itoen sponsors the popular *Oi Ocha* New Haiku Contest.

Participants

On January 25, 2022, the research team was able to give an online lecture about English haiku with eleven students at two junior high schools on Amami Oshima: Sumiyo and Ichi Junior High Schools. Six teachers including a principal and vice principal assisted in the classrooms. It was important not to jump to conclusions about these low numbers, they represented the entire population of the three grades registered in the two schools on the remote island.

Lesson Plan

The original plan was to visit one of the schools in person and accompany students from Sumiyo Junior High School on a walk. We planned to meet with a student and teachers from Ichi High School at a nearby mangrove park. There we were supposed to conduct a short lecture, a walk to sketch or photograph fauna and flora, followed by the announcing of haiku. On the day of the lesson, two class periods were scheduled from 9:45 until 11:45 (55 minutes each with a 10-minute break in between).

Due to the spread of COVID-19 to Amami Oshima announced by prefectural authorities, and lengthy quarantine protocols, the university recommended the cancellation of the physical trip to the island. In response, the island campus project team converted the lesson plans so that they could be smoothly carried out using sufficient broadband connections and information and communications technologies (ICTs). Since 2012, the implementation of videoconferencing platforms has been an effective tool on remote islands not only to promote education, but also island culture, community, education, medicine, and welfare. The Amami Islands “have identified tourism, agriculture, and IT as an industrial development triad and Amami City opened the business incubation facility” (Katsu, 2014, p. 11).

Testing of Photo-Haiku Knowledge

Word games are popular with people of all ages, and in all languages. Many readers of the *New York Times* daily newspaper play mini-crossword puzzles with clues, and the wildly popular online word game “Wordle.” Most school-aged learners of the Japanese language have had the experience of memorizing *Hyakunin Isshu* and playing *Karuta* for school homework and school competitions. There is also a playfulness in Japanese poetry, which makes it easy to enjoy. A 13th-century poet, Fujiwara no Teika, created the poetry game that is still played in Japan today. A player has to memorize the poems and faces of 100 poets as they appear on cards, and then the player must match them as in a game of cards. The result is that millions of Japanese people have memorized at least 100 poems (Honan, 2000). Over seven million readers of the vernacular *Asahi Shimbun* published in Tokyo since 1879 are comfortable seeing a haiku prominently displayed on the front page of its morning and evening editions (Nippon.com, 2014). The HAIQUIZ activity designed for this project was inspired from Sokei's (2021) use of *Karuta* cards in a fieldwork activity to raise consciousness of dialect among islanders.

In addition to reading haiku in newspapers, haiku is read by millions of haiku association members according to the past-president of Haiku International (HI) because of these “three greatest reasons: haiku is short and has the fixed form of 5-7-5 Japanese syllables; the theme of haiku is almost fixed, it is about nature and about seasons; haiku is short, people can remember them easily... even foreigners” Arima (2012). Focusing on the shortness, fixed form and fixed themes that have popularized haiku, a new word game was created in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Observations

The online lesson maintained exactly the same time schedule as planned for the face-to-face lesson. At first, the Amami junior high school students listened to a short lecture about the differences between English haiku and Japanese haiku, including how to count syllables in English. Second, the students were shown an instructional video on how to make photo-haiku from the New Horizon textbook (McMurray, 2021). Next, the students looked at pictures of Amami Oshima and the students were asked to briefly describe them. Then, a limited-timed quiz was given which required students to match 10 photos with 10 corresponding haiku printed on cards. Finally, the students were assigned homework to take an original photograph and to compose a haiku in English to create a photo-haiku. This is the 10-step flow of the lesson plan for the two periods:

1. DVD (English version) teaching materials were streamed before the class started;
2. Greetings from teachers in Kagoshima and Amami to all student participants;
3. Lecture on how to make haiku in English with comparisons to Japanese haiku;
4. Watch DVD on how to make photo-haiku (Japanese version) teaching materials;
5. Break (re-stream the English version of the video about making photo-haiku);
6. Lecture on how to make photo-haiku;
7. “HAIQUIZ” testing of photo-haiku understanding;
8. Kigo-hunting activity;
9. Haiku writing activity; and,
10. Homework assignment.

The online lesson plan flowed as scheduled (Figures 8, 9 and 10). The influence of familiarity seemed to have a positive impact on the students and kept their attention for two hours. The representation of island culture, fauna and flora in English may be an important source of influence in the construction of students’ attitudes and perceptions towards using the target language of English and the target literary form of haiku poetry. Greetings were given in English and the lectures were given in Japanese aided by PowerPoint presentation software.

Worried that the online version of the lesson might lose momentum after the break, we introduced the students to our new competition that we named “HAIQUIZ.” It was very popular when played face to face with junior and senior high school students during the pilot test. The English letters HAI is the first English syllable of haiku but many players thought it sounded like “hi” meaning “hello.” The “quiz” was a quick ten

minute test with several questions. HAIQUIZ tests students on their English skills related to photo haiku composed on themes related to Kagoshima Prefecture and in particular, Amami Oshima. The island students avidly played HAIQUIZ, a Newspapers in Education (NIE) event designed by Mackzemi university students. The teachers observing the quiz activity quickly grasped how much English language photo haiku is enjoyed around the world.

All students replied in English during the kigo-hunting activity, mentioning that they keenly wanted to write haiku about the sea, mangrove forest, Amami rabbits and Ryukyu long-haired rats, and other symbols of Amami. They created local season words which were translated into English by their teachers from the pictures shown during the HAIQUIZ, including:

Mainland Kagoshima Prefecture → Amami Oshima

Bamboo forest → Mangrove forest

Miyama Kirishima → Amami Asobi

Fukiagehama → Ohama Seaside Park

Pork miso rice → Chicken rice

Encountering a classroom activity using photographs and the use of keywords unique to Amami Oshima through the use of English as an international lingua franca might contribute to learners' perceptions of English users and communication with English-speaking tourists. This in turn could impact the young islanders' views of language ownership and pride of belonging to a local community of interest to the global community.

Results

According to Norimasa Hara (2022, Jan. 26 personal communication), the principal of Amami City Sumiyo Junior High School, the students' highly appreciated the "guidance on how the Japanese culture of haiku can be expressed in English and other languages, and how to make haiku in English." He asked for continued understanding and support for the educational activities of the school in hopes that an in-person visit could be made to the island.

The English teacher who coordinated the research project on Amami Island, Yukari Moon noted on the day that students composed their homework, "In Amami, the scarlet cherry blossoms color the mountains very vividly." She confirmed that the Junior High School student participants were able to successfully submit haiku by the deadline to publish in the *Asahi Shimbun* (McMurray, 2022) as well as create their own original photo-haiku (Figures 1 to 5 reprinted with permission).

Figure 1

*Countless momentary things
next to spring
they were dancing*



Note. Kaito Kawauchi was impressed by the ephemeral movement of myriad flowers near Sumiyo Junior High School on Amami-Oshima island.

Figure 2

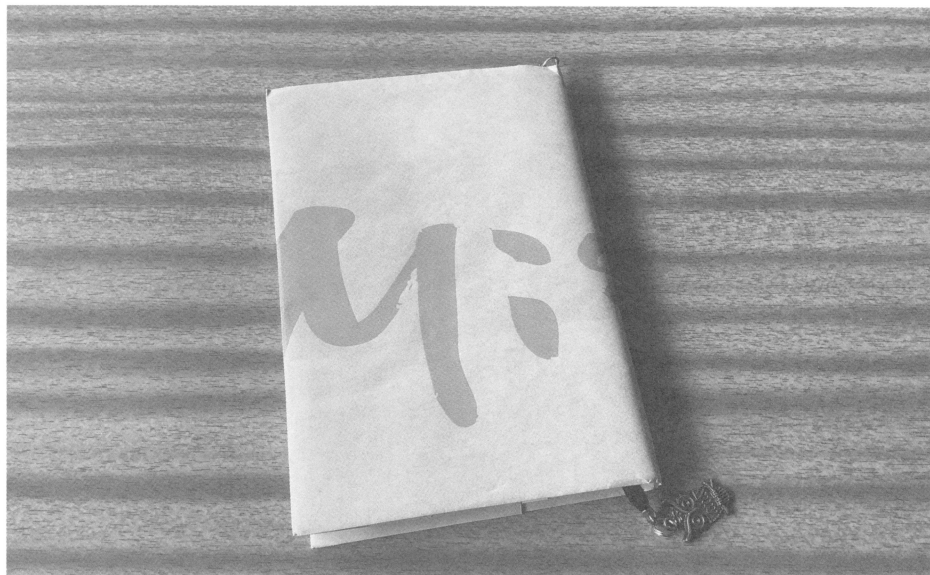
*Many paintings
forever cherry blossoms
good tea*



Note. Ryusei sipped cherry blossoms that had been preserved in sea salt. Kanh-izakura (winter cherry trees) flower in February near Yamato Village in central Amami Oshima at the foot of Mt. Yuwan.

Figure 3

*This is a book
fall reading
makes me calm down*



Note. Kotenyu Chibana might have recited a line from an English lesson.

Figure 4

*Drifting moon
alone on an autumn night
no one reaches*



Note. Sumiyo Junior High School student Ai Urui, hopes turtles return to nest under a full moon. Baby turtles return to the coast of its hometown for spawning in approximately 20 years.

Figure 5

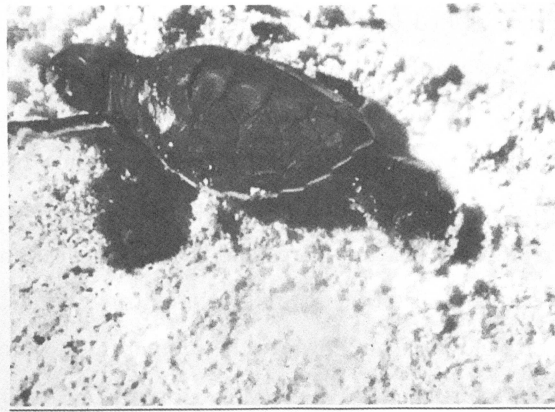
Sea turtle

the warm sandy beach

cozy sea breeze

Haiku in English

Ichi JHS Grade: 1st Name: Yudai



俳句

Sea turtle
the warm sandy beach
cozy sea breeze

日本語訳

ウミガメさん、暖かい砂浜、心もよい海風

俳句について

夏休み中の旅行で見つけた海ガメと
その時の様子について書きました。

Note. Students at Ichi Junior High School on Amami-Oshima island look forward to welcoming back hawksbill and green turtles from their long-distance migrations, according to first-grader Yudai. He studied how to write haiku in English with the Sumiyo Junior High School students.

Suggested Further Study

With many schools shifting intermittently on and off between online or face-to-face learning, the project team will try to design future HAIQUIZ photo haiku competitions to accommodate virtual, in-person, and hybrid classrooms. In whichever delivery format, the representation of islanders, their unique culture, fauna and flora will be core features of the teaching materials.

There is potential for cooperation on exchange projects in the field of environmental protection between students at The International University of Kagoshima and students on Amami Island. The university is located 15 kilometers from Kiire Town, which is the northern limit (31°20'N) for mangroves to grow in Kagoshima Prefecture. A small stand of *Kandelia candel* mangrove provides an eco-system that is also home to mongoose and sea turtles. For example, elementary school students at local Kiire Elementary School regularly clean turtle nesting areas of PET bottles, empty boxes of sweets, and discarded fishing gear on the beach of Daimaru Village, Kiire Town. Turtles can suffer ill effects from eating plastic bags by mistake and by getting entangled in fishing gear so there is potential benefits for the fauna. The circle of cooperation includes the local residents who learned about the initiative, and the coast is gradually becoming cleaner. Tourists also frequent the sea turtle spawning grounds which are located close to houses and the main road. The Maenohama coast in the Kiire area is a spawning area and hatched turtles can be seen scuttle off into the Kinko Bay. Females who survive the perils of the sea return to nest in 20 years. From May through August, loggerhead sea turtles spawn on sandy beaches down to the southernmost tip of the Satsuma Peninsula at Cape Nagasakibana, the legendary birthplace of the folklore story of Urashima Taro. Students cleaning the beaches who were interviewed (Minami Nippon, 2022) said they aspired to become marine researchers who protect the environment.

Conclusion

This project investigated ideas to promote the language study of island keywords. It revealed the educational potential and tourism applications for studying unique cultural identities and flora and fauna species which demarcate Amami Oshima as a unique place in the world. Residents of the remote island, including students, were able to share their unique community through haiku and photo-haiku composed in English. In future this sharing can take place online, in tourist brochures, and with events that include visiting tourists from around the world.

References

- Arima, A. (2012). Keynote speech. *Haiku International Association*. https://www.haiku-hia.com/uploads/doc/hpr2012_keynote_speech.pdf
- Ediger, M. (1993). Middle school pupils write haiku. *Resources in Education* (28) 11-12.
- Golden Triangle Haiku Contest. (2022). Golden triangle BID announces 2022 golden haiku winners. *Cision PR Newswire*. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/golden-triangle-bid-announces-2022-golden-haiku-winners-301503431.html>
- Great Britain Department of Education and Science Inspectorate of Schools. (1987). *Teaching poetry in the secondary school: An HMI view*. Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Hayward, P. & Kuwahara, S. (2008). Retaining shima in shima uta: Music as mnemonic expression of heritage in

- contemporary kakeroma. In I. Novaczek (Ed.) *Refereed Papers From the 3rd International Small Island Cultures Conference, Sydney, Small Island Cultures Research Initiative* (pp. 64-68). <sicrinetwork.org/archives/ISIC3>
- Honan, W.H. (2000, March 6). Why millions in Japan read all about poetry. *The New York Times Section E*, p. 6. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/06/books/why-millions-in-japan-read-all-about-poetry.html>
- Japan Times. (2001, August 11). College to offer English haiku class. *The Japan Times*. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2001/08/11/national/college-to-offer-english-haiku-class/>
- Katsu, S. (2014). IT industry fever miracle on Amami-Oshima. *South Pacific Newsletter* (25). Kagoshima University Research Center for the Pacific Islands.
- McMurray, D. (2021). Original script created for the “New Horizon” video. *IUK Journal of Intercultural Studies* (22)2. 79-88.
- McMurray, D. (2022, February 18). Asahi Haikuist Network. *Asahi Shimbun*. <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14547571>
- McMurray, D. (2022, March 18). Asahi Haikuist Network. *Asahi Shimbun*. <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14569670>
- Minami Nippon (2022, March 27). Protect the sea turtle spawning ground. *Minami Nippon Shimbun*. https://373news.com/_news/storyid/153409/
- Nippon.com (2014). Newspaper circulation in Japan: Still high but steadily falling. *Nippon.com* <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00084/>
- Ofsted (2007). Poetry in schools. A survey of practice. [https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7075/8/Poetry_in_schools_\(PDF_format\)_Redacted.pdf](https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7075/8/Poetry_in_schools_(PDF_format)_Redacted.pdf)
- Peters, I. (2011). A sea of stories: islands as shima in Rattawut Lapcharoensap’s sightseeing. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 41(1), 143-161.
- Sokei, H. (2021). Using karuta in a seminar activity to raise consciousness of dialect. *The IUK Journal of Intercultural Studies* (21)3. 237-249.

Appendix

Figure 6

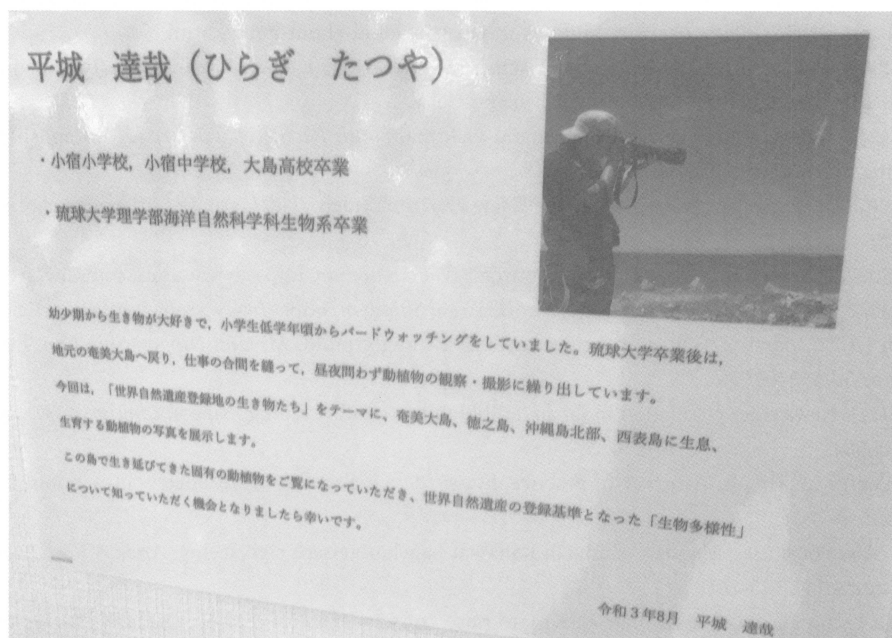
Photograph of Amami World Heritage Display at Aeon Department Store in Kagoshima



Note. This promotional display afforded a good opportunity to gauge tourist interest.

Figure 7

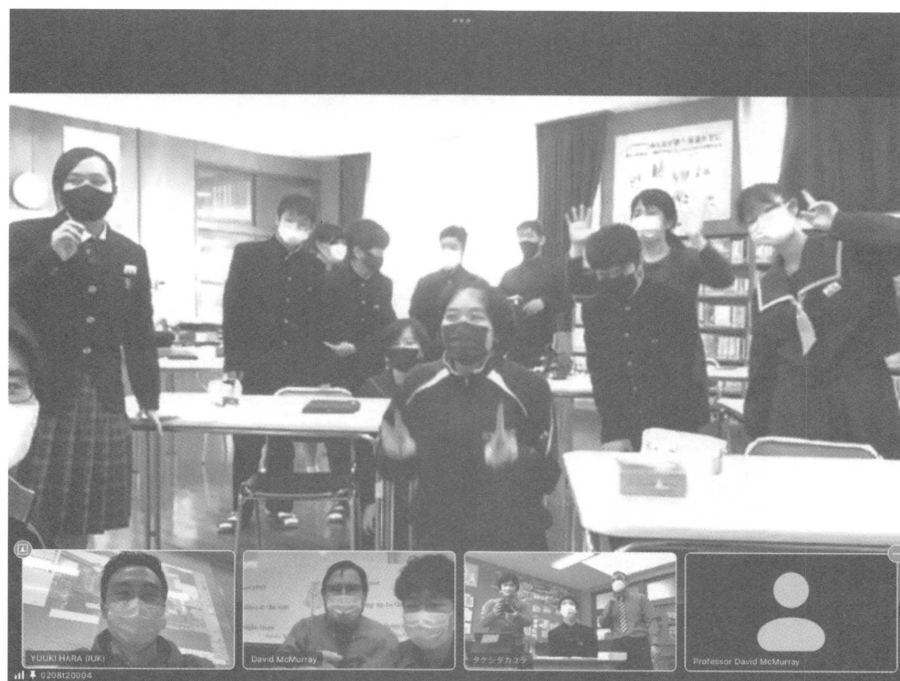
A Shingle for Hiragi Tatsuya, an Amami Island Nature Photographer



Note. This local art display afforded a good opportunity to visualize the potential for photo-haiku as well as identify seasonal references for fauna, flora, and human cultural activities.

Figure 8

Photograph of Connected Online Classrooms in Amami Oshima and Kagoshima



Note. February 25, 2022, Ichi and Sumiyo Junior High Schools and IUK

Figure 9

Photos when the Haiku Lecture was in Progress



Note. February 25, 2022 at Sumiyo Junior High School

Figure 10

Photograph of University Students Conducting HAIQUIZ



Note. Image of the students at the Junior High School on Amami Oshima is projected on the whiteboard of the university ICT classroom.