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**Metaphor in English Haiku: A Cognitive Approach**

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**Abstract**

Haiku, a genre of short poetry that originated in Japan about six hundred years ago, has now become worldwide popular. Although numerous attempts to arrive at a definition of English haiku have been successful, the nature of its poetic inventory is still being questioned. The paper suggests a technique of exploring metaphor in English haiku by way of applying the iconicity tools viewed from a cognitive linguistic perspective. While the Japanese language displays pure iconicity, for the system of its hieroglyphic writing visually signals the meaning, English haiku show iconicity more subtly, through metaphors. A few juxtaposed images in haiku visualize an image-schema that reflects a mapping from the source domain onto the target domain. There is an iconic moment in the alignment of these image-schemas when we try to establish similarity between the image juxtaposition in haiku and skeletal structures recurring in our sensory or motor experiences – *Transformation*, *Circle*, etc. For example, the *Contact* image-schema can be traced in the haiku by C. Bleichert: *taking the combs / out of her hair – / Spring wind*, representing the cause and effect relationship between the haiku images. Explicating this image-schema enables the reader to recall a respective life moment that may serve as the metaphor target. Thus, construing the image-schema of haiku with regard to the source domain represented verbally, we might reconstrue the metaphor target as well. Such reasoning, largely dependent on the reader's associations, relates to the *aha*-effect as the philosophy behind both Eastern and Western haiku, borrowed from Zen.

**Key-words:** English haiku, metaphor, iconicity, image-schema.

## I. Introduction

Haiku, a genre of short poetry that originated in Japan about six hundred years ago, being brought to its peak by Bashō in the late seventeenth century, has now become worldwide popular (Higginson, 1996: 9, 11).

A contemporary prolific author and researcher of English haiku, George Swede explains a growing interest to haiku by its shortness and seeming simplicity (Swede, 2000: 14). The British haiku "guru", R.H. Blyth (1898–1964) offered an explanation for the increasing internationalization of haiku, claiming that Zen, the philosophy behind Japanese haiku, is a universal spirit, and haiku is the kind of poetry that responds to this spirit best (Blith, 1942).

Since the end of the 19th century, the "seeds" of haiku have been broadcast in the English-speaking world by various intermediaries, among which Imagism, a movement that derived its technique from classical Chinese and Japanese poetry, stressing clarity, precision and economy of language; haiku translations from Japanese; numerous how-to-do haiku handbooks, etc. (Higginson, 1996: 24 – 26).

Like any other form of literature, English haiku has grown out of a long process, and it is subject to a number of restrictions (Swede, 2000: 14). The latter, on the one hand, have been historically imposed upon it since the text is inescapably shaped or framed by prior (though not fixed or internal) cultural assumptions (Toolan, 2001: 28) and, on the other hand, are heavily guided by a new cultural background. That makes a famous British haiku poet, David Cobb, even believe that Western haiku poets should begin to see themselves not as mere followers but great contributors and even leaders in the development of haiku (Cobb, 2011: 4–5). However, the traditionally established guidelines for writing haiku in English (3 lines, 17 syllables, a seasonal word and clear language) are not slavishly obeyed by all the English-language haiku poets. As a result, each criterion seems to have a few corollaries (Swede, 2000: 15) and a definition of the English haiku still remains rather vague (Cobb, 2011; Swede, 2000), which may be illustrated by a mocking haiku by Mark Rutter:

*The English language*

*Haiku: over-defined and  
Over-defensive*

(Blithe Spirit, 44)

One of the most controversial criteria often stressed in haiku handbooks is that haiku should be an objective record of things experienced (Arkenberg, 2008). The poet does not use one object or idea to describe another, using A to understand B. In other words, haiku is often defined as a poem which avoids poetic devices, even metaphor (Shirane, 2000: 53).

However, numerous legendary Japanese haiku masters (Basho, Issa, Busson) are known to have used metaphor in their poetry, for example:

*About to bloom,  
and exhale a rainbow,  
The peony*

(translated by R. Roseliep)

Busson (On a Rhyming Planet, 20)

The peony is pictured both literally and figuratively: every flower blooms at its proper time but the one in the haiku above is endowed with a kind of magical power, for it is capable of breathing out a rainbow when breaking into blossom. An unusual hyperbole based on the conceptual metaphor PLANTS ARE LIVING BEINGS implies rainbow flecks of sun rays – an optical effect emerging quite often in sunny weather.

Today more and more haiku researchers claim that metaphor is central to haiku as to any other kind of poetry (see Carriello, 2010; Shirane, 2000; Swede, 2000). However, the fundamental difference between the use of metaphor in haiku and that in other poetry is that in haiku it tends to be extremely subtle and indirect, to the point of not being readily apparent (Carriello, 2010). The metaphor in good haiku is often hidden or even deeply concealed within a poem. Even the seasonal word in Japanese haiku often tends to be inherently metaphorical, since it conveys

very specific literary and cultural associations, but its dominant function remains to be descriptive, leaving the metaphorical dimension implied (Shirane, 2010: 56).

Metaphor in Japanese haiku has been widely studied by Masaka Hiraga (see Hiraga 1998; 2002; 2005; 2006), who claims that metaphor is tightly linked to iconicity which is defined as a mapping between the structure of a text and the meaning or image it conveys. In poetic texts this interplay of metaphor and iconicity is particularly foregrounded (Hiraga 2005: 27). Still, while the Japanese language displays pure iconicity, for the system of its hieroglyphic writing visually signals the meaning, English haiku show iconicity and its interplay with metaphor more subtly, which is the focus of our research.

## **II. Iconicity in Metaphor**

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which the qualities of one thing are carried over to another (Simpson, 2004: 41). Traditionally, we have thought of metaphor in terms of linguistic images. For instance, in the haiku by Robert Smith each butterfly's touch to women's skin is metaphorically portrayed as a kiss envied by the lyrical hero:

*a domesticated butterfly*

*it kisses all the women*

*I cannot kiss*

(Blithe Spirit, 14)

In cognitive linguistics where metaphor is defined as a cognitive process in which one set of concepts is understood in terms of another (Deane, 1995: 628–629), metaphor is treated as a conceptual base which, according to Lakoff and Turner (1989: 67–72), gives rise to linguistic expressions in four ways: “extending a conventional metaphor in a novel way”; “elaborating the image-schemas by filling special or unusual cases”; “questioning the limitations of conventional metaphors and offering a new one”; and “combining multiple conventional metaphors” forming composite metaphors (see also metaphor transformations in Kövečses, 2002, and Vorobyova's cognitive analysis of Woolf's “The Mark on

the Wall”, 2005). Each metaphor establishes a mapping between the source domain and the target domain. In other words, metaphor allows us to understand a relatively abstract idea in terms of a more concrete and structured domain of experience, often presented through image-schemas, which Johnson defines as ‘recurring structures of our perceptual interactions, bodily experience and cognitive operations’ (Johnson, 1987: 79). Additionally, cognitive studies of poetry (see Freeman, 2000, Hiraga, 1999, 2002; 2005) have clarified that a poetic text can be metaphorical on two levels, local and global. Local metaphors, which manifest themselves locally as linguistic expressions in the text, are based on either conceptual mappings (systematic mappings at the conceptual level such as events as actions, life as a journey), image mappings (mapping of the motor-sensory images evoked by linguistic expressions in the source superimposed onto the target, e.g. the colour of objects mapped onto feelings), or a combination of both (Hiraga, 2005: 27). Alongside, text as a whole can be read metaphorically, which is the case of global metaphor (Hiraga, 1999), when the text presents a source which is to be mapped onto a target of larger concern (Hiraga, 2005: 27). According to Lakoff and Turner (1989: 146–147), a reading of the text as a global metaphor is constrained in three major ways: by the use of conventional conceptual mapping; by the use of commonplace knowledge; and by iconicity.

Masako Hiraga in her cognitive papers on Japanese haiku (see 1998; 2002; 2005; 2006) states that metaphor and iconicity are similar cognitive operations since both are based on the analogical mapping between different domains. However, iconicity was not given a prominent role either in conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Turner, 1989), or in conceptual integration theory by Turner and Fauconnier (2002). By the same token, in the famous Charles Sanders Peirce’s classification of icons that includes *images*, *diagrams* and *metaphors* (Short, 2007: 27 – 59) the latter are only briefly discussed in contrast to his recurrent explanation and description of images and diagrams (Hiraga, 2005: 31–33).

Although metaphor and iconicity are regarded as similar cognitive operations, they are not the same. Hiraga claims:

Iconicity deals with a mapping between form and meaning in various degrees of abstractness, whereas metaphor is a mapping between two conceptual domains of meaning, a projection of schematized pattern from a less abstract domain onto a more abstract target domain (2005: 25).

In spite of the difference metaphor and iconicity in haiku display close links, resulting in iconicity-in-metaphor and metaphor-in-icon formats.

Iconic moments in metaphor manifest themselves as image-schematic structures that generate specific meaning (Hiraga, 2005: 35). As we have already noted, image-schemas are skeletal patterns or structures that recur in our sensory and motor experience, perceptual interactions and cognitive operations. Pierce calls this structure ‘diagram’ (The Commens Dictionary of Pierce’s Terms, 2003) which shows the abstract structure which resembles the structure of their object (Hiraga, 2005: 32). The model of blending developed by Turner and Fauconnier (2002) offers a promising theoretical basis and an effective methodological contribution to explicating the interrelationship of metaphor and iconicity.

According to the model of blending, metaphor is a conceptual integration of four mental spaces. When a conceptual projection occurs, two input mental spaces (source and target in a metaphor) are created. The generic space maps onto each of the input spaces and reflects some abstract structure shared by the inputs. The blended space also receives partial projections from the inputs. The blend is a rich space integrating the generic structure, structures from each input space and background information (see Turner and Fauconnier, 1996: 283).

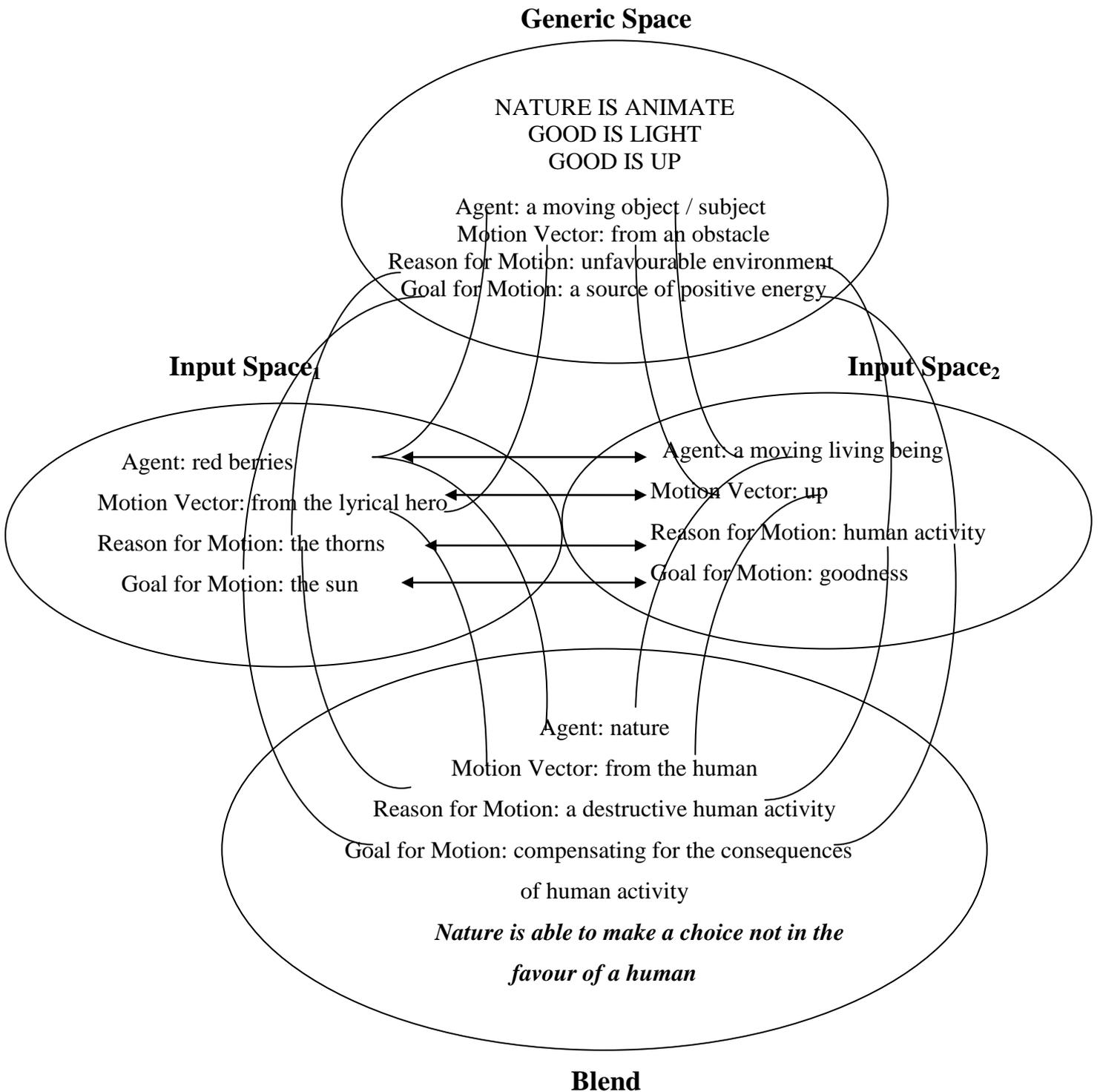
Let us take a look at the following haiku by Thom Williams:

*in the thorn field  
red berries stretching  
from me to the sun*

(Kō, 10)

The haiku includes a few simple nature images: the image of a thorn field with red berries, the image of the sun and that of a lyrical hero. At the first glance, the poem is devoid of rich figurativeness: the haiku describes a common process of a plant following the sun. However, the lyrical hero perceives the natural phenomenon in a different way: s/he is disappointed because the berries stretching to the sun respectively turn from him. Thus, the berries are endowed with human capacities and feelings. On the ground of this two conceptual metaphors that serve as the basis for the haiku images are drawn on: NATURE IS ANIMATE and GOOD IS LIGHT / GOOD IS UP. Actualized in the text, these conceptual metaphors manifest the lyrical hero's perception of nature as a living-being that is able of making a choice: in the thorn field the berries stretch to the sun as an energy source. The epitome of goodness for them is the sun, not a human who is used to exploiting nature merely for personal needs.

The image-schemas which structure the mental spaces of the haiku conceptual integration pattern are *Blockage*, *Enablement* and *Vertical Orientation* (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1. Conceptual Integration Network for Thomas Williams's Haiku**

Red berries in the first input space correlate with moving living beings, their motion vector being from the lyrical hero through thorns – with an attempt to deter from destructive human activity and reach the sun that for the plants stands for goodness. The blended space allows us to extend a hidden, emergent meaning of

the poetic metaphor of plant motion towards the sun: at a certain moment nature might give up protecting the human from the thorn field for it needs salvation itself. Therefore, nature is able to make a choice not against the human because of their devastating activity.

The metaphor of plant motion towards the sun that is drawn on in the blended space could be characterized as a global one since the poetic text as a whole acts as a source which is mapped onto a target of more global concern – nature as a whole (not only red berries) is able to make a choice not in the favour of a human.

The emergent meaning and the conceptual integration network as such illustrate the interplay of metaphor and iconicity due to the image-schemas which come into play in each of the mental space: moving entities have to overcome (*Enablement*) an obstacle (*Blockage*) on their way up, towards good (*Vertical Orientation*). There is an iconic moment in the alignment of these image-schemas (Hiraga, 2005: 6) as far as the reader establishes a similarity between the image juxtaposition in the haiku and skeletal sensory-motor structures entrenched in his/her memory. The interplay between metaphor and iconicity is not a static product of structuring, but a dynamic process because it emerges from, is elaborated by and integrated with background knowledge, contextual information and human feelings (Hiraga, 2002). Essential to Lakoff, Johnson, and Turner's position is that metaphor "happens" not on the page but in the mind of the reader. It is the reader who recognizes the connections between the source domain and the target domain, and fills in the slots necessary for coherence between the two, the reader who creates the map of the metaphor and initiates the necessary connections (Cariello, 2010: 40).

We have stated earlier that the nature of metaphor in haiku is different from that in other literary texts since it is indirect and very subtle. Therefore, it probably needs a special term alongside with 'global'. There are two terms that have been suggested for such a metaphor. These are 'deep metaphor' (see Cariello, 2010) and 'absolute' metaphor' (see Ross, 2007). The latter one seems to be more accurate

for its definitions reflects the essence of haiku. It was coined by Bruce Ross, a famous American author and researcher of contemporary English haiku, to describe an organic or existential relationship between the parts of a haiku that construct its wholeness. He elaborates:

Haiku may be regarded as a relation of the particular with the universal. Whereas most poetry is dependent on metaphor, with the affective force of the imaginative comparison determining its success, haiku, in its uniqueness, is constructed upon an “absolute metaphor” of the natural particular and the universal (2007: 59).

Ross points out that the very structure of traditional haiku lends itself toward drawing parallels between the human and nonhuman worlds and that “the absolute metaphor in haiku includes the presentation of a state of wholeness in which the particular leads to the absolute and first things” (Ross, 2007: 60). Thus, metaphor in haiku reminds of the relationship of a part of something used for the whole, like in synecdoche. Getting an idea of something small, we discover a larger, more important truth about nature and ourselves:

*ants everywhere –  
they too are entering  
a new millennium*

(Stepping Stones, 40)

The haiku by David Cobb draws our attention to tiny creatures, ants. However, the ants are featured as if they were like people who are “*entering a new millennium*”. The image is grounded in the conceptual metaphor ANIMALS ARE PEOPLE as a part of the Great Chain of Being which was first put forward by Lakoff and Johnson in 1998.

Whatever metaphor in English haiku might be called, its main function is to give an insight into something important via portraying something of, seemingly, no crucial importance. It is not accidental then why this kind of poetry is often named aha-poetry (see Reichold, 2000). The Aha! effect, which is believed to be created in it, is defined by modern psychologists as “the sudden appearance of a solution through insight, a peculiar phenomenal experience that people have when

they solve a problem (Topolinski, 2010). The Aha! effect in English haiku occurs when the reader is believed to construe the so-called ‘absolute metaphor’, thus, when the reader grasps an emergent meaning of the haiku global metaphor.

The philosophy of Aha! effect in English haiku correlates with the philosophy of ‘satori’ behind Japanese haiku poetry. ‘Satori’ is a Japanese Buddhist term for enlightenment, meaning “understanding”. Contemporary English and Japanese haiku researchers (See Reichold, 2000; Shirane, 2000; Swede, 2000) often claim that haiku is not haiku without satori. However, English haiku can best be understood as a form of poetry and not as part of any religious/philosophical outlook. What then provides haiku with the power to evoke feelings of transcendence? George Swede states that the most important factor seems to be the inclusion of nature (Swede, 2000: 28) that is definitely intrinsic for English haiku similarly to Japanese haiku and manifested in them by the seasonal word – a rough equivalent of the Japanese ‘kigo’ (季語, "season word") (see Gilbert, 2006).

Therefore, the term ‘Aha! effect’ could be an adopted and westernized version of ‘satori’. The technique of association in English haiku which is vital in its interpretation and understanding its absolute metaphor has also been borrowed from Zen where it is called “oneness” and shows how everything is part of everything else.

### **III. Metaphor in Icon**

As it has been mentioned earlier in this paper, metaphor-icon links manifest themselves in English haiku not only as iconicity in metaphor but also as metaphor in icon.

G. Lakoff and M. Johnson provide a basic insight into how metaphor can give meaning to form (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980: 126–138). There are a handful of conventional conceptual metaphors which function as a useful tool to give iconic meanings to form. M. Hiraga calls these conceptual metaphors ‘grammatical metaphors’ because they more or less concern the relationship of form and

meaning in grammatical conventions (phonology, morphology, word formation and word order) (Hiraga, 2005: 41).

Given that we conceptualize language by orientational and ontological metaphors, that is, in terms of space and in terms of objects, and that linguistic expressions are containers and meanings are contents (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980: 126–138), it becomes evident that the bigger containers have the larger contents – MORE MEANING IS MORE FORM. Therefore, prolongation, repetition and reduplication of linguistic forms such as a sound, a syllable and a word tend to stand for more of the content (Hiraga, 2005: 41). Hence, SIMILARITY OF CONTENT IS SIMILARITY OF FORM and, consequently, DIFFERENCE OF CONTENT IS DIFFERENCE OF FORM that always has a specific iconic meaning (Hiraga, 2005: 42 – 43), for example:

*plastic pond*

*the frog jumps*

*past it*

(A Shift in the Wind, 46)

On the one hand, “*plastic pond*” in David Cobb’s haiku represents a local poetic metaphor based on the conceptual metaphor POLLUTION IS SOMETHING ALIEN and constitutes a part of the haiku’s absolute metaphor which goes back to the conceptual metaphor RESCUE IS ESCAPE – “*the frog jumps / past it* [the plastic pond]”, perhaps, looking for a better water basin. The image of the frog that “*jumps past*” the “*plastic pond*” metaphorically shows nature’s desperate attempts to rescue itself from a destroying human activity. The image-schemas that abstractly represent the relationship between the images in the haiku (the frog and the plastic pond) and have an iconic meaning could be *Blockage* (the polluted pond) and *Path* (the frog’s attempts to find a better place for living).

On the other hand, the plosive /p/ alliterated four times in the haiku might imitate the sound of the knock on something plastic, thus marking a phonosemantic facet of metaphor-icon links.

Iconicity represents itself not only via grammatical metaphors but also through an unusual placement of haiku constituents (words, punctuation, etc.), which can be viewed as borrowed from an inventory of Japanese image-building devices. In terms of visual elements, the Japanese language has a visually rich writing system called representative since it has three different types of signs used to describe the same phonological text: *kanji* (Chinese logographs), *hiragana* (syllabary for words of Japanese origin) and *katakana* (syllabary for words of foreign origin other than Chinese) (see Hiraga 2006: 134–135). The choice and use of certain logographs are of particular importance because they function as a cognitive medium for poetry (Hiraga, 2005: 10). Let us look at the example of poetic text illustrating one of the most vivid iconicity representations in English haiku:

*winter solstice –  
the long dark night stretches  
towards the stars*

(Stepping Stones, 132)

As we can see the second line of David Rollins's poem is considerably longer than the other two, which reflects the specificity of its content and meaning – "*the long dark night stretches*".

Thus, metaphor that gives iconic form to language can manifest itself in different ways, some of which are quite immediate for the reader's understanding and interpretation (such as a visual placement of haiku's components), whilst others require more reader's efforts to interpret them. This is actually typical for Japanese haiku too, which must be completed by the reader (Keene, 1997: 28). The term 'visual metaphor' suggested by M. Hiraga for such metaphors (See Hiraga, 2006) could be borrowed for similar metaphors in Western haiku and defined as a metaphor that gives an iconic form to haiku meaning.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This research done to explore metaphor in English haiku as a relatively new genre of English poetry with a particular emphasis on its interplay with iconicity

has shown that metaphor, being central to English haiku as to any other kind of poetry, possesses a number of specific features, which makes it fall into three types according to its mere verbal manifestation in the text, its own underlying philosophy, and also its link with iconicity.

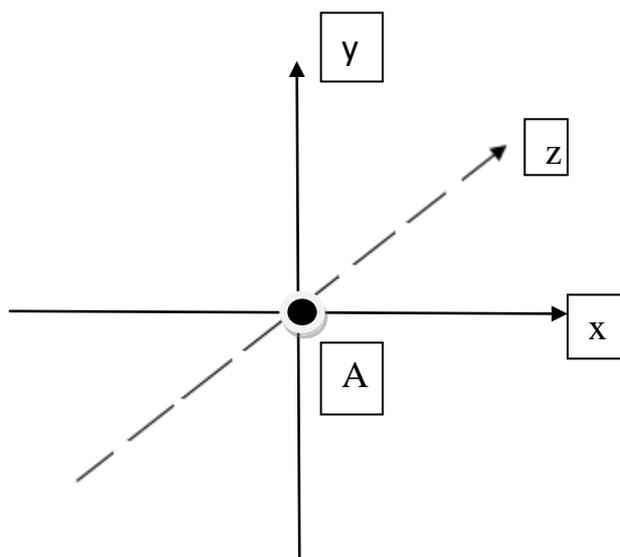
First and foremost, English haiku include local metaphors – linguistic manifestations of conceptual metaphors since human cognition is metaphorical in principle, which is reflected in language and texts.

Secondly, a global metaphor which can come into play in any literary text acquires an additional importance in English haiku due to its oriental poetic and philosophical influence. Zen as a philosophy behind Japanese haiku regards everything as a part of something bigger, more important and global. English haiku gives an insight into the transcendent through the reference to nature. Therefore, a global metaphor in English haiku that represents the wholeness through its tiny part might be also termed ‘absolute’.

This feature or even a philosophy of English haiku's metaphor can be further highlighted by respective conceptual integration networks where the blended space reveals the connection of the non-human and human. The network also shows the interplay between metaphor and iconicity since the four spaces are structured by image-schemas that come to the surface when we try to establish similarity between image juxtaposition in haiku and skeletal structures recurring in our sensory or motor experiences.

Thirdly, another manifestation of metaphor-icon links in English haiku is a visual metaphor which gives an iconic form to haiku meaning through phonology (alliteration, assonance, rhythm, rhyme, etc.), word order, syntax, an unusual placement of haiku lines, letters, etc. Such a metaphor can be located somewhere in-between the local and absolute metaphors in English haiku: on the one hand, it is represented in the text visually, which brings it closer to linguistic metaphors, on the other hand, it contributes a lot to the emergent meaning of the haiku's absolute metaphor since it functions on the textual macro-level.

Therefore, the above types of metaphor structure the trimeric (three-dimensional) space of English haiku, the model of which is given below:



***Fig. 2. Trimeric Model of English Haiku***

This model has three axes – x, y and z. Each of them represents a type of metaphor traced in English haiku: x-axis stands for local metaphors, and can be called a horizontal axis representing the present, the contemporary world; y-axis (which can be called vertical or paradigmatic) indicates the presence of absolute metaphor which leads to more global knowledge, history and culture ; z-axis that constitutes a spatial axis represents haiku's visual metaphors; and, finally, point A where the three axes intersect stands for the Aha! effect – a special moment when the haiku is completed by the reader who has blendintegrated the content of haiku, its visual output, the reader's associations, feelings, and cultural background gaining enlightenment.

Thus, the major features of metaphor in English haiku are as follows:

- its exceptional subtlety and indirectness;
- its reference to global human concerns;
- possessing iconic moments;
- its ability to give iconic form to meaning.

Undoubtedly, the question of metaphor in English haiku should be further investigated, perhaps, employing a more elaborated methodological framework

and a more detailed analysis since the very genre of English haiku, though quickly developing, is still in its infancy. However, whatever we call metaphor in English haiku, this poetry is a unique means of re-presenting the world in an innovative way.

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