WHAT FEATURES CHARACTERIZE A GREAT HAIKU?

- This question has in the past been addressed qualitatively in terms of literary critique of structure and content, usually by experts who write up an analysis

- But it has not to my knowledge been addressed sufficiently from a quantitative or statistical point of view
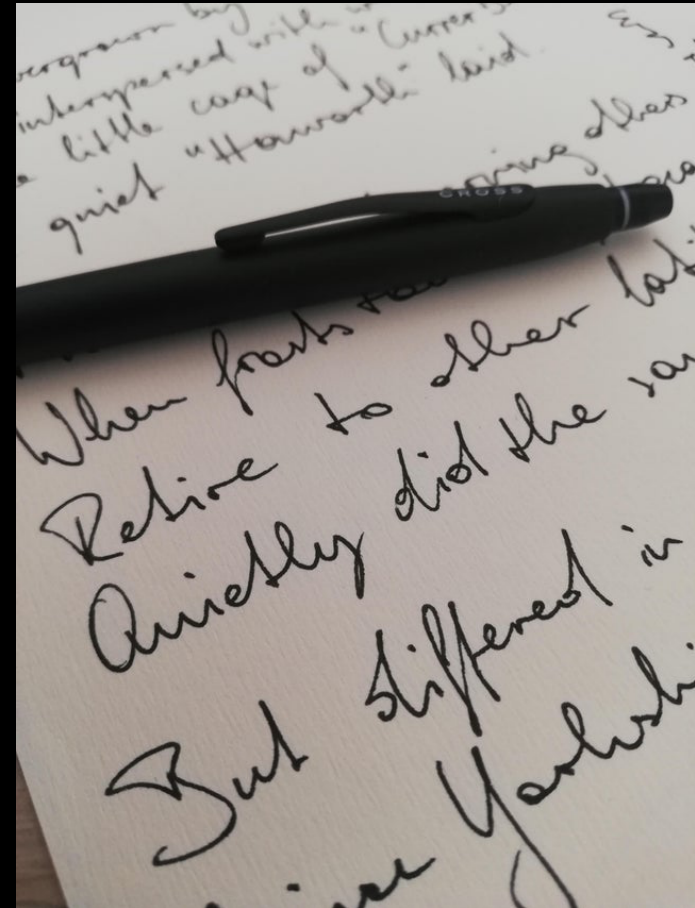
OUTLINE OF THE CURRENT STUDY

- Data source: Harold G. Henderson contest winners dating from 1996, so a 23 year time span

- Looked at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places, but those analyses are not presented here, only the aggregate data

VARIABLES MEASURED

- The surface level (syllabic) dependent measures analyzed were:
- Syllables Per Line
- Total # Syllables
- Total # Lines
- Total # Words
- Number of Syllables in each line
- Line 2/Line 1 RatioLine 2/Line 3 Ratio   Line 1/Line 3 Ratio
- Short-Long-Short-Ratio
- # Syllables in Each Word
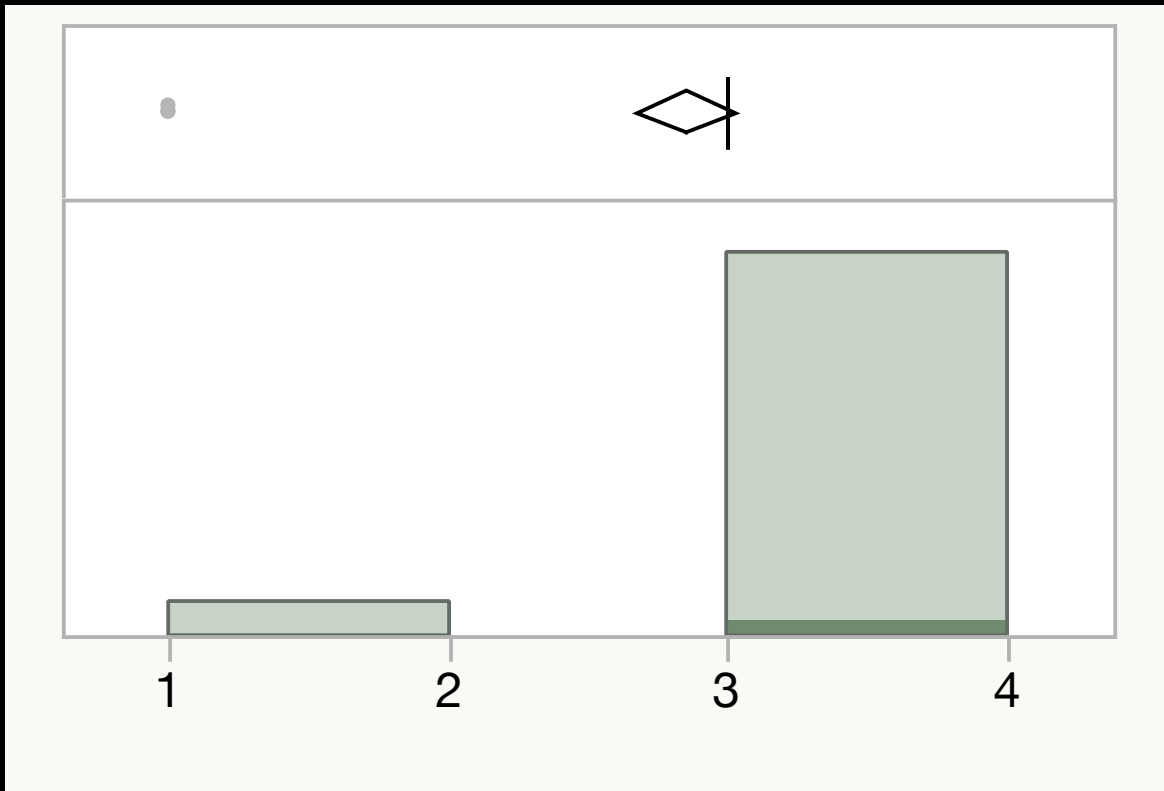
SYLLABLES PER LINE
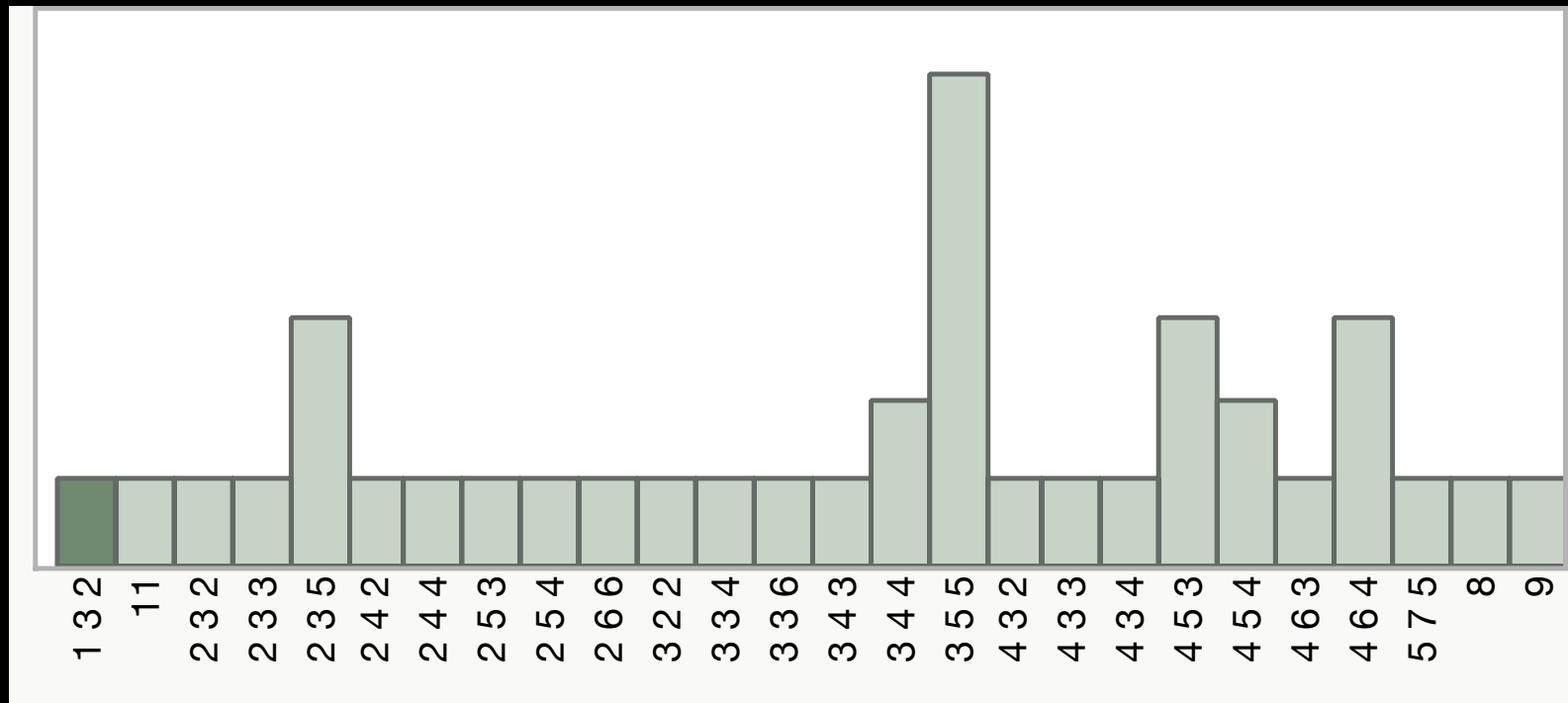
- Max is 6
- Min is 1
- 3 5 5 stood out as the most common
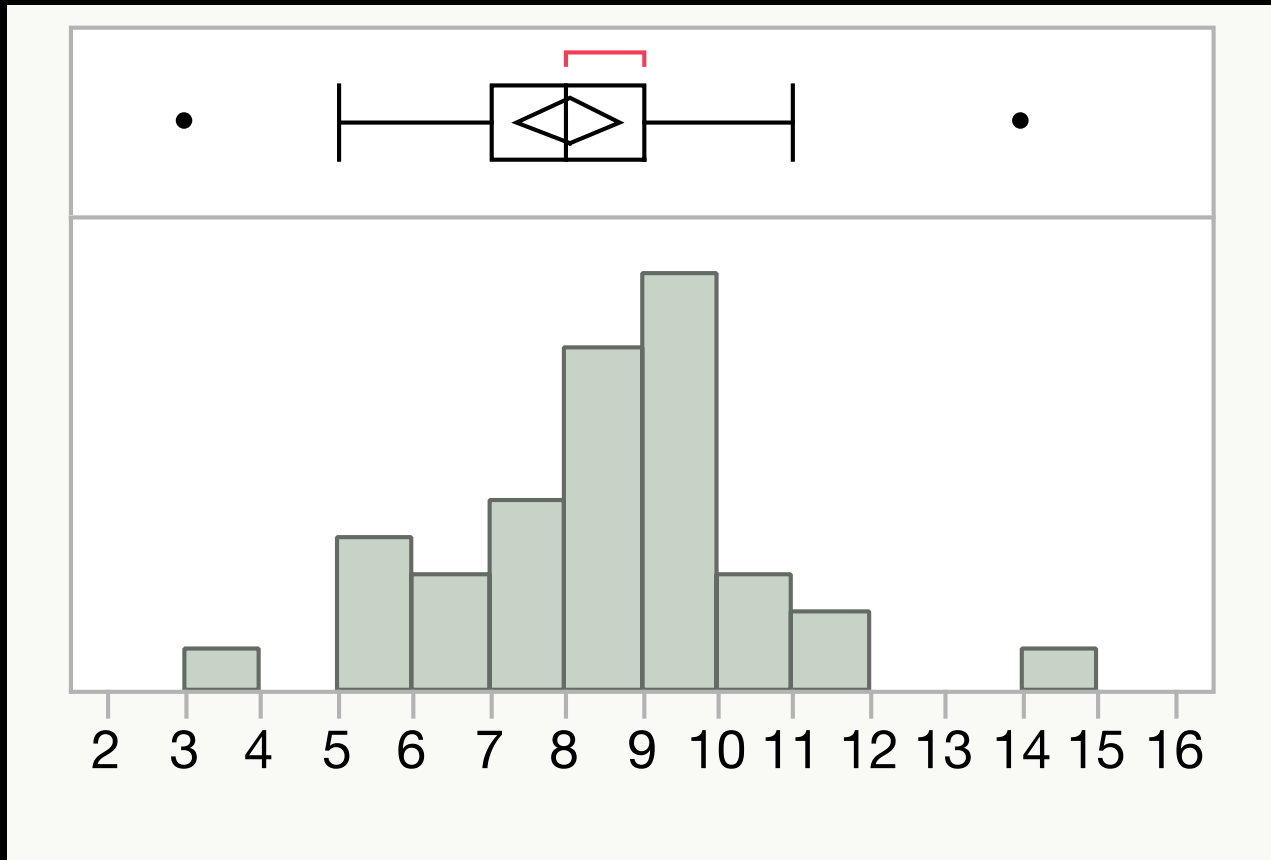
TOTAL NUMBER OF SYLLABLES
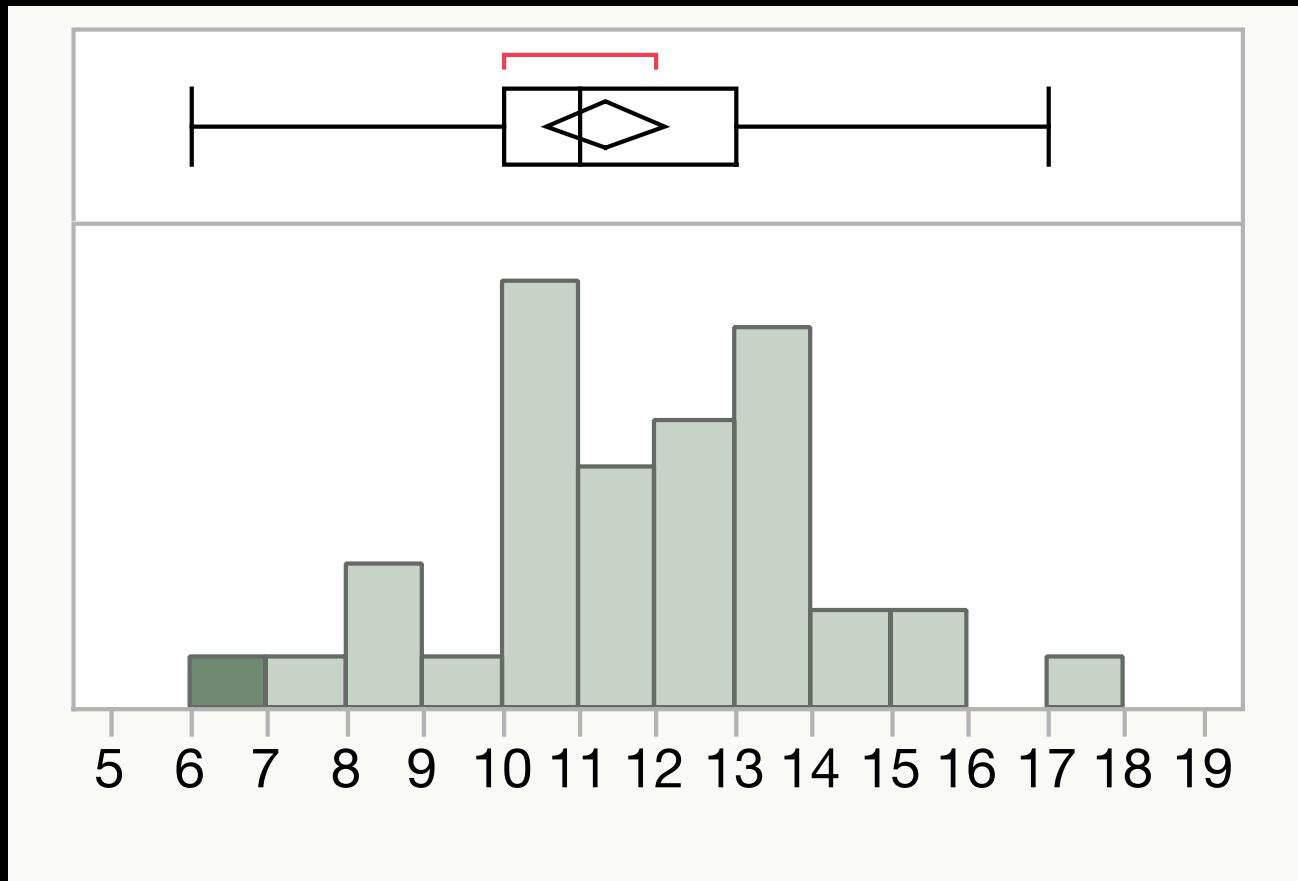
- Most frequent was 10 syllables
- Second-most frequent was 13 syllables
- Box plot shows median, upper and lower quartiles, and the minimum and maximum

TOTAL NUMBER OF LINES

- As you can see the vast majority of poems submitted were three-liners, with a much smaller minority of monoku
- There were no poems submitted that were two-liners or four-liners
- There were no poems conforming to different forms of lineation, such as a vertical orientation
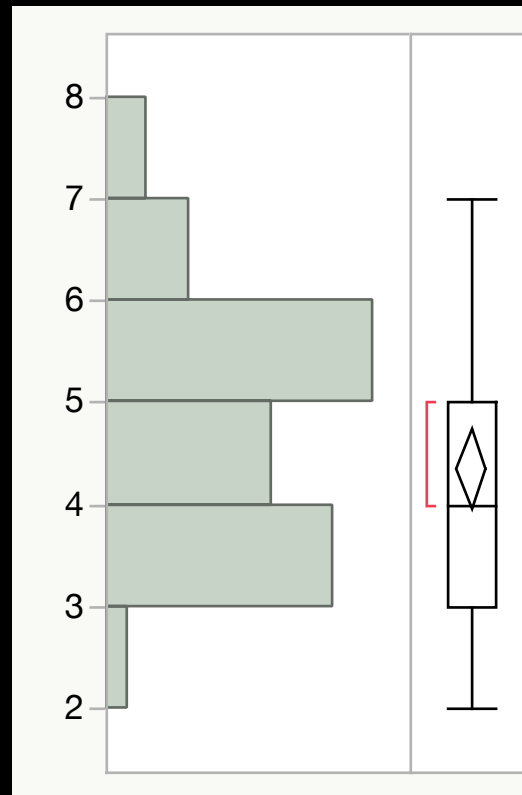
TOTAL NUMBER OF WORDS

- Most of the haiku have nine words in total
- The fewest number is three, probably a monoku
- The largest number is fourteen
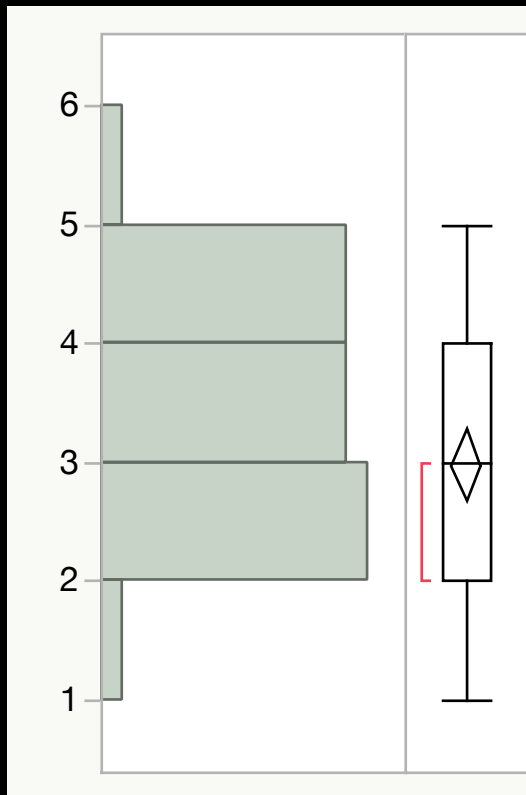
First Line

Second Line
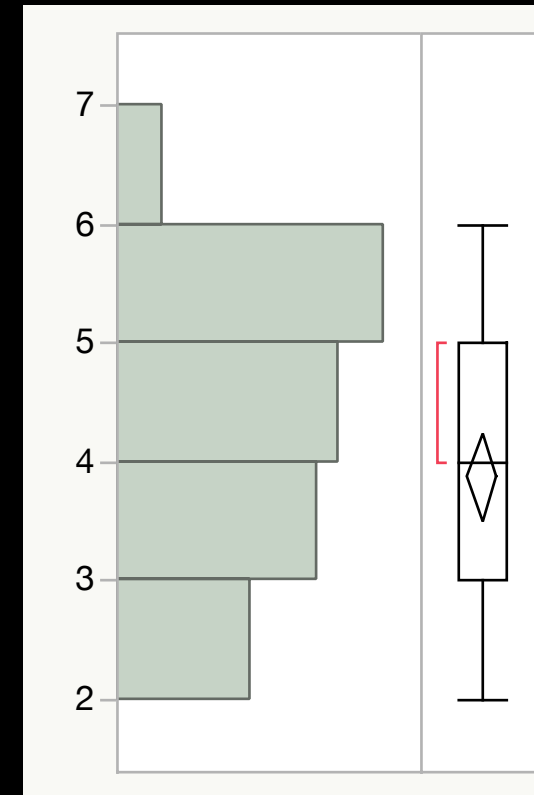
Third LIne

SHORT-LONG-SHORT FORMAT
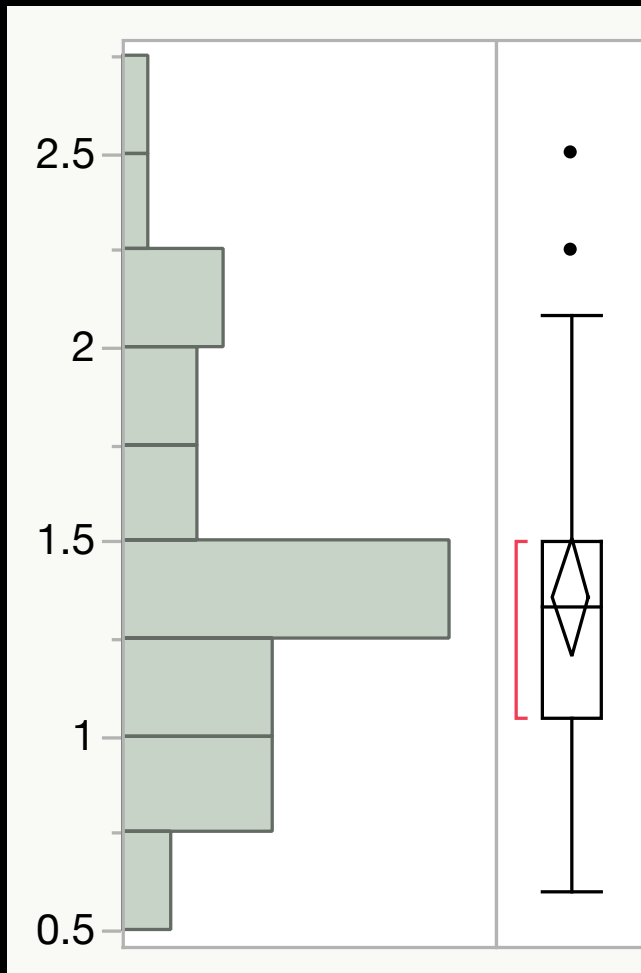
- The data support the fact that these poems conform to the short-long-short format
- The S-L-S format predicts the 2/1 ratio and the 2/3 ratios will be greater than one
- They also predict the 1/3 ratio will be centered on one. Both of these predictions were confirmed
- Further evidence to support this comes when we combine these ratios into a single measure, the S-L-S combined formula that is shown here
- S-L-S ratio = mean(2/1 + 2/3)/1/3) where the numerator is expected to be higher than the denominator
- This is borne out. The peak in the distribution is greater than one

WORD SYLLABLE ORGANIZATION

- This plot shows the number of syllables in each word of the poems
- The most frequent format was 2|112|11 which occurred twice
- All other formats occurred once
- It is difficult to tell from this data if there is a preferred format. One is not significantly greater than two.

SYLLABLE CODING

Chart categories (top to bottom): SSS, SSB, SSA, SFF, SFB, SBS, SBF, SAS, SAF, SAB, FSS, FSF, FSB, FSA, FFB, FBS, FBF, FAB, BSB, BFF, BBS, AAF

S=Symmetric
A=Asymmetric
F=Front Loaded
B=Back Loaded

- Each line of the haiku were analyzed in terms of two attributes
- First, whether the line was symmetric or not. If it was symmetric every line either contained words with the same number of syllables or contained arrangements where a central word was flanked on the left and right with an equal number of syllables
- Second whether a line contained more syllables at the beginning or at the end in which case it was either front loaded or back loaded. These are ascending or descending versions of asymmetric patterns

SYLLABLE CODING CONTINUED

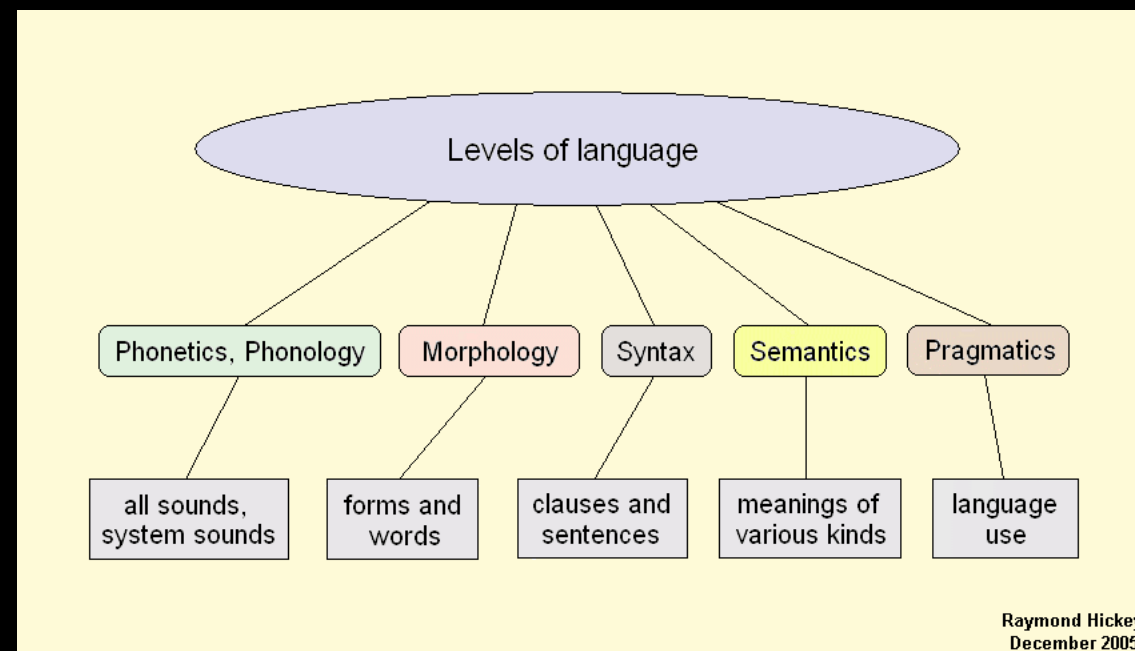- The greatest preference by far was for SSS patterns in which all the lines were symmetric (Frequency of 10)

- There were secondary preferences for SBS (Frequency of 4) and SAS (Frequency of 3) in which the first and last lines were symmetric

- So we see a clear preference for symmetry either across all three lines or in the first and last lines
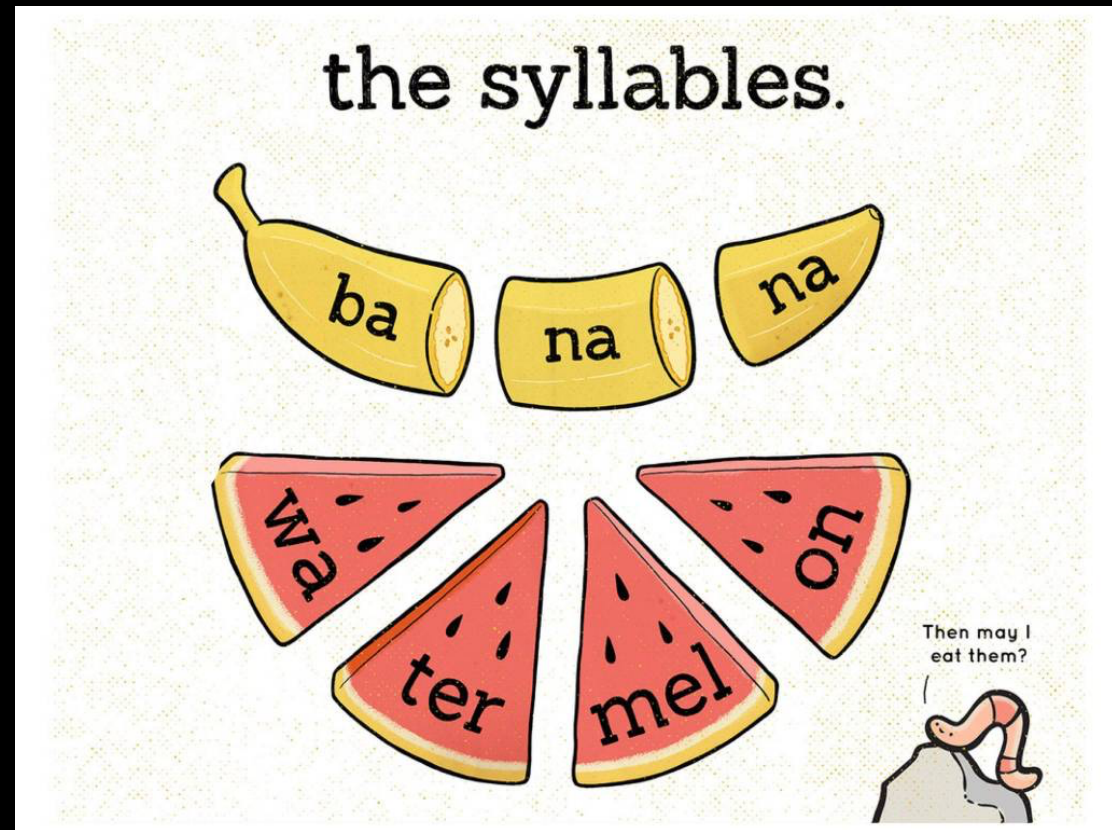
SURFACE AND DEEP STRUCTURE

- The preceding variables were all surface level phonetic aspects of the poem

- But we also obtained a measure of the judge's evaluation of the haiku, since each was accompanied by a paragraph or more of evaluation

- These evaluative texts were analyzed for keywords that summed up or condensed the judge's opinions

- So this amounts to a deeper semantic level of interpretation

Levels of language

Phonetics, Phonology | Morphology | Syntax | Semantics | Pragmatics

all sounds, system sounds | forms and words | clauses and sentences | meanings of various kinds | language use

Raymond Hickey
December 2005

KEYWORD ANALYSIS
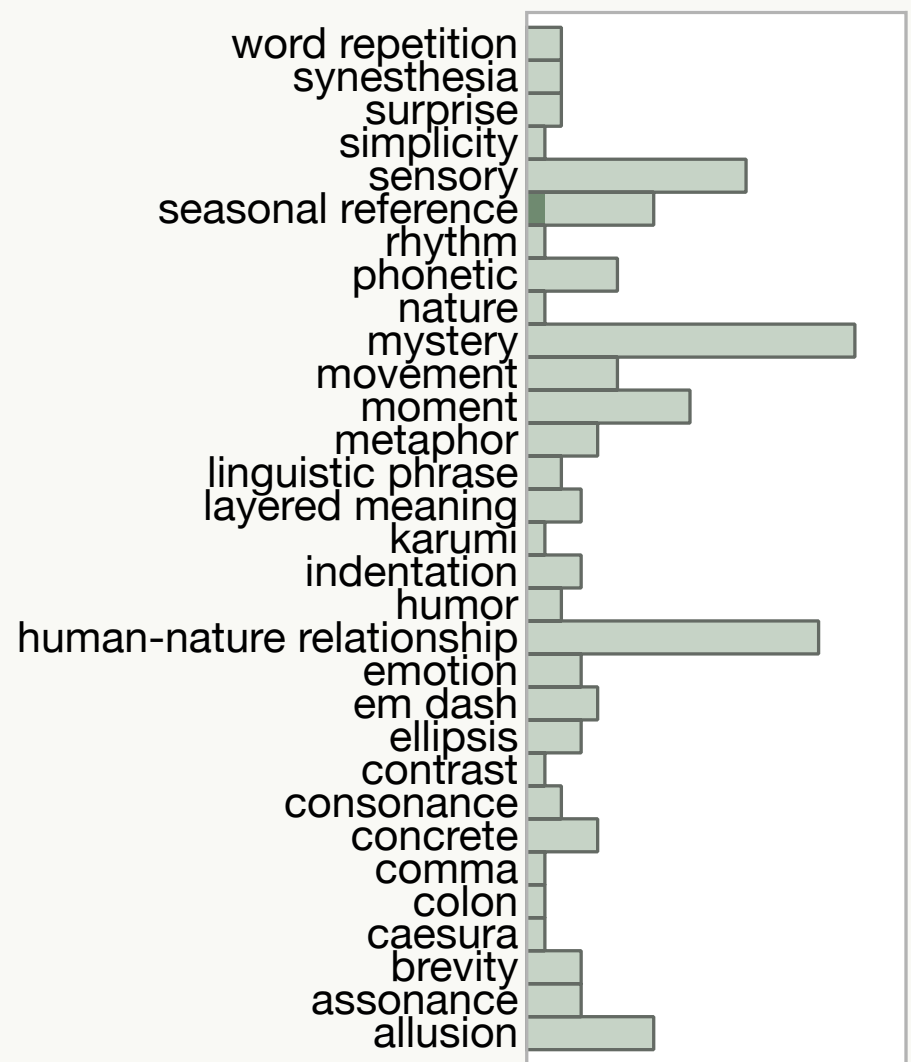
- They sum up major topics or aspects of the commentary
- Were fairly consistent across judges. Many of them touched on the same topics
- Mystery was the number one feature
- This was followed by human-nature relationships
- In third place was sensory qualities
- And in fourth were seasonal reference and the use of allusion

SUMMARY

- So you want to write a winning haiku? Here is how:
- Use a 3 5 5 syllabic line structure
- Keep the total number of syllables between ten and thirteen
- Use three lines rather than a monoku
- Use eight or nine total words
- Use 2-4 words in the first line, 3-6 words in the second, and 6 words in the third
- Use a short-long-short line format
- Use lines that have symmetric syllabic structuring across all three lines or that have symmetric syllable formatting in the first and last line
- Use mystery or the relationship between humans and nature as themes. Sensory qualities, seasonal references and the use of allusion are also important

STAGES IN WRITING

- Just because these conclusions are mostly about surface structure does not mean that we should start with that as our primary goal

- It is important to approach a poem from a semantic perspective first.

- Focus on the content, then during a secondary stage of editing focus on words, lines, and syllables

- More work is needed to determine which additional semantic properties are considered attractive

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- **Strengths:**
1. Data collected over a long time span
2. A novel methodological approach to understanding haiku and other forms of poetry
3. Can provide insights into analyzing syntactic and semantic properties of poems

- **Limitations:**
1. Only haiku were analyzed, not senryu or other Japanese poetic forms
2. Based on one contest only
3. Descriptive analyses were performed, not statistical tests for looking at differences, like t-tests, correlation/regression, and ANOVA

CONTACT INFORMATION

- Thanks for your attention!
- Anybody who wants a copy of these slides please email me a request
- I can reply back attaching a copy of the PowerPoint file
- My email is: jay.friedenberg@gmail.com

WORKSHOP

- Let's take some time to practice what we've learned!
- Try writing one or two haiku that satisfy some of the criteria from the study:

1. In a first stage focus on content. Attempt to incorporate mystery, human-nature relationships, sensory qualities and allusion
2. In a second stage review the structural aspects of your poem and try to bring them into alignment with the study findings: use three lines, a short-long-short lineation, and symmetric syllabic sequencing