Plotting Poetry 2025

Transforming Poetic Thought into Waka:

How to Pack the Skeleton into a 31-Syllable Closet

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Project Goals

- Reverse-engineer modern interpretations into waka
- Identify compression patterns for poetic thought
- Explore constraints and expression in 31-mora form

Poetic Rules may include:

- Omission of grammatical elements
- Inversion of word order
- Symbolic substitutionk
- Nominalization
- Manipulation of ambiguity
- Compression of meaning
- Expansion of meaning
- Reinterpretation of context

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Methodology

Materials

- Kokinshu: a collection of 1000 waka poems
- Modern Japanese translations
- Parallel corpus of waka and modern Japanese translations
- Contemporary paraphrases

Computer programms

- Align waka with contemporary paraphrases
- Use phrase gloss and structured data
- Analyze rule types and transformation limits

Challenges

- Literal vs. interpretive gaps
- Compression loss in reverse mapping
- Ambiguity in source expressions

Waka as Ecosystem

- Waka is not an isolated product of individual expression.
- It emerges from relational interplay:
  nature, emotion, tradition, audience, and poetic form.
- This is why **an ecosystem model** best describes waka structure.

> “A poem of just 31 syllables cannot exist in isolation—it must depend on interrelation.”

Ecosystem Equation for Waka

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W = f(R, N, H, C, V)
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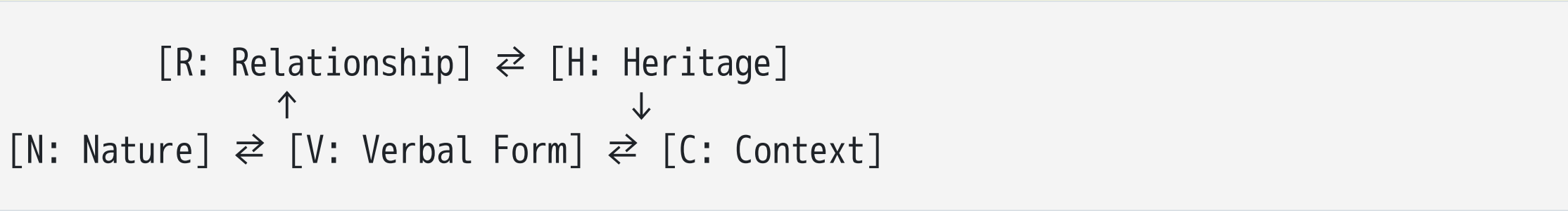
- **R**: Relationship (e.g. reply, dialogue, past love)
- **N**: Nature (e.g. moon, spring, wind)
- **H**: Heritage (e.g. classical allusions, uta-makura)
- **C**: Context (narrative or emotional setting)
- **V**: Verbal form (e.g. inversion, omission, poetic structure)

Diagram of Interrelation



- No element stands alone—each depends on and enriches the others.
- Meaning arises not from the parts, but from their **interdependence**.

Case Study: Ise Monogatari, Section 4

> 月やあらぬ／春や昔の／春ならぬ／わが身は一つ／もとの身にして

- Everything changes (moon, spring)
- Only “I” remain the same—yet this self is defined in relation to what is lost.
- An **ecosystem of absence and memory**.

```
W_Ise4 = f(R_lost love, N_moon/spring, H_classical imagery, C_silent reunion, V_elliptical form)
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Implication

- Waka poetry is not just **compression**—it is **relational construction**.
- Ecosystem thinking allows us to describe poetic generation **not as encoding**, but as **emergence**.

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From Monolith (single voice) → To Ecosystem (relational resonance)
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Toward a Model

- Create typology of transformation rules
- Visualize linguistic constraints
- Evaluate poetic fidelity and transformation cost

Methods

- Using a parallel corpus of waka and modern Japanese translations
- Align waka with contemporary paraphrases
- Use phrase gloss and structured data
- Analyze rule types and transformation limits
- Identify compression patterns for poetic thought

Results

- Identify and classify poetic strategies
- Analyze how poetic thought is transfigured
- Uncover underlying rules (overt and covert)
- Explore the implications of compression
- Simulate the transformation process:

Discussion

- Explore poetic compression in modern Japanese
- Analyze constraints in poetic expression
- Discuss implications for translation and interpretation
- Consider cultural and linguistic factors

Conclusion

- Waka as a lens for poetic thought
- Compression as a creative constraint
- Future research directions
- Implications for translation studies

Conclusion

- Content of the work is impressive
- Author's skill is impressive as well