

Japanese Short Poem Senryū's: A Perspective from the “Superiority Theory of Humor”

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Abstract

Senryū is a Japanese short poem written in 5-7-5 syllables and reflects the various aspects of human life in a humorous or satirical way. Every year, numerous senryū competitions covering various topics are held in Japan. Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company's senryū competition (サラッと一句! わたしの川柳コンクール/*Saratto ikku! Watashi no Senryū Konkūru*) (old name: サラリーマン川柳(*Sararīman Senryū/Salaryman Senryū*)) is the most popular and longest-running competition in Japan. In this competition, people express what they experience daily and the difficulties they encounter in business, etc. So, in the present study, the poems compiled from Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company's Senryū Competition in the years 1990-2020 related to family relations will be analyzed from the perspective of the Superiority Theory of Humor. This theory can be identified as a feeling oneself superior to others' mistakes and misfortunes.

In conclusion, the Superiority Theory of Humor is seen in most of the senryū poems. The topics are behind the technology and trends, which are below the beauty standards of society, such as being ugly and fat. The reader feels superior by experiencing a sudden victory that he/she has not experienced the above-mentioned bad situations himself/herself.

Keywords: Family, humor, Japanese short poem, senryū, superiority theory

Introduction

People need humor to stay away from the negativities and stress they experience in daily life. For this reason, they treat humor as a tool in various literary genres. The characteristic of this genre of poetry is that it deals with human life from the point of view of humor or black humor. The Senryū poetry genre expresses real intention (本音 /honne) in Japanese society. People are curious about humorous poems written about others without masks in this context. It is also vital in Japanese society and poetry genres.

Senryū is defined in デジタル大辞泉(*Dejitaru Daijisen*)¹ Dictionary as “It is a zappai (雑排) genre that dates back to the middle of the Edo period. It is a 17-character short poem with an independent theme named after the first generation of poetry judges (点者/tenja) who represented this poem. There are no restrictions such as season words (季語/*kigo*) or punctuation words (切字/*kireji*), and it is characterized by the use of informal (conversational) language to depict the subtleties of life, the state of the world, and customs in a humorous and satirical manner.”

There are rules of senryū and it is written in 5-7-5 syllables. However, in some cases, this rule is stretched, and syllables can be overstated *jiamari* (字余り) or reduced syllables *jitarazu* (字足らず). The words we speak (colloquial language) are fundamental in senryū. Of course, written language can also be used. As in haiku, there is no obligation to use seasonal words (季語/*kigo*) and punctuation words (切れ字/*kireji*). Discriminatory terms cannot be used. Hurting people with disabilities and finding faults in people's past is not in the spirit of senryū. By sticking to writing, it is necessary to avoid the use of terminological words deliberately. When the sense of boasting, such as medical, legal, and Buddhist terms, is added to the poem, it will be a narrow senryū that can only be understood by the person and the people in that world. In proper names, such as the names of famous people and place names, it must be decided whether they are known to many people. Even if the poet uses his family's name, those who can understand are limited only to those around him. When writing poetry, there must be works that make many people experience the same feelings and become more valuable as time passes. *Katakana* (カタカナ) or English words can also be used. However, it needs to be understood by many people. Senryūs, which consist only of *hiragana* (ひらがな) and *kanji* (漢字), are also acceptable (Sugiyama, 2011:43).

Laughter has always been a part of life. In this regard, humor is present in various literary works. The humor in the Japanese short poem senryū is created by addressing one's shortcomings or defects and addressing someone

¹¹ デジタル大辞泉(*Dejitaru Daijisen*) electronic dictionary.
<https://www.weblio.jp/> (11.10.2024)

else's shortcomings or attitudes. The poems in this study are open to applications from anyone in Japan. The fact that the poems are written by amateur poets of different genders and age groups provides diversity in the poems. People who read the works empathize with the poets and laugh by feeling superior to those in the poems.

While a haiku often juxtaposes two disparate objects, a typical senryū presents a unique situation and asks the reader to view it through the lens of reason or common sense. This approach often leads to feelings of superiority, incongruity, or relief, which in turn leads to laughter. The universality of these feelings ensures that readers of senryū, regardless of their background, feel understood and engaged.

As explained above, senryū is humorous poetry in which people write about the satirical things around them. The topics are varied, so each person can find something in the poems. Also, this reflects Japanese humility well. In Japanese, 自虐ネタ (jigyaku neta) means a self-deprecating joke. Many poems are written in this style, so this makes other people laugh at the situation.

One unique aspect of senryū is the use of pseudonyms. Poets often use pseudonyms to express their feelings and experiences freely, as these pseudonyms provide a veil of anonymity and allow them to write about personal or sensitive topics in a satirical or humorous way. Readers also find something from their lives in poems, making the genre of senryū still more popular.

In this genre of poetry, people write poems using pseudonyms. So, people can write freely about their lives in a satirical or humorous way that cannot be said directly to the person who is related. Regarding using pseudonyms (pen names), poets can use only one pseudonym throughout their lives or a separate pen name for each poem.

In Japanese culture, *Honne* (本音) means “*real intention; true meaning*,²” and *tatemae* (建前), “*principles; theory; opinion*.” A person's real intentions (*honne*) can be contrary to what is expected by society. So, they are often kept hidden, except with one's family and closest friends. *According to one's position and circumstances, Tatemae (建前) is what society expects and requires*. It cannot match the real intentions. So, it can be said that people have a chance to express “*honne (本音)*,” honest thoughts about the topic in senryū.

There are many senryū competitions written on various topics in Japan by amateurs. For example, the *Silver Senryū* (シルバーク川柳) competition, which deals with issues related to the elderly and old age, and the *Sayonara*

² 英和 - 和英辞典(Waei-eiwa Jiten/Japanese English- English Japanese Dictionary)
<https://www.weblio.jp/> (11.10.2024)

shibō (サヨナラ脂肪) *senryū* competition, which deals with topics related to obesity and dieting.

Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company's (第一生命保険株式会社/*Dai-ichi Seimei Hoken Kabushikigaisha*) *Senryū* Competition is the best-known, longest-running, popular competition in Japan, which is used in this study. It is called (サラッと一句！わたしの川柳コンクール/*Saratto ikku! Watashi no Senryū Konkūru*).³ This competition was first held in 1987 among the company's own employees. However, due to the high demand, it has been open to the application of anyone in Japan since 1990. The company announces the details about the competition on its website, and a large number of people who write poems submit their poems.

There are many studies on the *senryū* which are discussed from different perspectives. Ito's (2014) study is about Silver *Senryū*, which portrays the honest opinions of elderly people. It analyzes it from the perspective of vocabulary and themes and observes the phase of imagined scenery reflected by elderly people daily. Apart from this work, Ito has also studied different types of *senryū* competitions. For instance, concerning the poetry contest that is the subject of this study, Ito (2016) analyzed the poems from the characteristics of vocabulary expression and imagined scenery in "Salaryman *Senryū*."

The genre of Salaryman *senryū* contest covers a variety of topics. It includes topics such as family relations, working life, life in Japan, television programs, new trends in Japan, etc. Doğan (2022) analyzed the coronavirus effect seen in Japanese *senryū* poems between 2020 and 2021 and titled "Reflection of coronavirus perception in Japanese short poem *senryū* through the salaryman *senryū* poems."

Although the *Senryū* poetry genre originated in the 18th century, it is still popular in Japan today. Humorous elements in the poems allow people to have fun when they read, which is why they find a part of themselves in humorous poems. There is much research on humor theories. However, the literature review focuses on the Superiority Theory of Humor and the Poetry genre.

The researches on the analysis of poems in the context of the Superiority Theory are given below.

Hança (2024) analyzed Karacaoğlan's poems in the context of Modern Humor theories, including superiority, psychoanalytic, and disharmony theories. Karacaoğlan is considered one of the most prominent Turkish poets. Another study on the analysis of Turkish poems in the context of humor

³ https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/entry/story_jp_628f58bee4b0edd2d0202bb8 (11.10.2024). Originally, this competition started under the name of "サラリーマン川柳" (Sararīman *Senryū*/Salaryman *Senryū*).

theories (Superiority Theory of Humor) is Karakaş's (2019) "Spats of minstrels according to the Theory of Superiority." He analyzes the minstrels' quarrels and the elements of humor seen from the aspect of the Superiority Theory of Humor.

In the studies above, it has been seen that the poet or reader feels that the mistake or false made by the people in the poems will not be made by poet/reader, and this makes one feels superior and laughs.

After screening the literature review, it is seen that although there are more studies on humor theories, such as theater plays, poems, and jokes in other languages (such as Turkish), there aren't many studies on the Japanese short poetry genre *senryū*s and humor theories.

This study will contribute to the studies related to the Japanese humorous poem *senryū* analyzed from the aspect of the Superiority Theory of Humor.

Methods

The poems collected in this study will be analyzed using the Superiority Theory of Humor. Humor is present in every aspect of daily life and ends with laughing. Various theories about humor have been put forward to date.

Theories of Humor

Humor is a phenomenon that has the characteristics of the society in which it is produced and reflects the society's culture. Humor is conveyed through various linguistic word games. In this section, traditional theories of humor will be explained. There are three traditional theories: Relief Theory, Incongruity Theory, and Superiority Theory. Western thought about humor and laughter begins with Plato.

Aristotle agreed with Plato that laughter is essentially derisive and that in being amused by someone, we find that person inferior in some way. To find someone's shortcomings funny, he added, we must count them as relatively minor; otherwise, they would disturb us (Morreal, 1987:14).

Many people know that laughter relaxes people. There are two ways of relief. Maintaining that relief might fit into laughter in two ways. One may have come into the situation with the negative energy to be relieved, or the humorous situation itself may provoke the constitution of the nervous energy and its release. That is to say that the person may be already nervous and find humor a way of releasing that nervous energy. Or, the humor itself might cause some nervous energy that needs to be released through humor and laughter (Morreal, 1983:21). Spencer was the first to put forward the Relief theory. It is known that the most famous representative of the theory was Freud.

The other humor theory is the Incongruity Theory, and it is explicated below:

The basic idea behind the incongruity is very general and relatively simple. We live in an orderly world, expecting specific patterns among things, their properties, events, etc. We laugh when we experience something that does not fit into these patterns (Morreal, 1983:15-16). The most well-known proponents were Kant and Schopenhauer. Kant states, "In everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh, there must be something absurd. Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (Cited in Morreal, 1983:16).

In this theory, the person encounters an unexpected incompatibility. However, this unexpected dissonance shows that he is logically compatible on another level, so the person laughs.

The Superiority Theory is one of the oldest known theories. A Japanese proverb relates to feeling superior to others' mistakes and failures. This proverb is 他人の不幸は蜜の味 (Ta'nin no fukō wa mitsu no aji) and means, "The misfortune of others tastes as sweet as honey. Human beings, by nature, take pleasure in the unhappiness or weakness of others. Although it is denied, this feeling is present in everyone. This is 'schadenfreude' in German and the same word is expressed in Japanese as 他人の不幸を喜ぶ (Ta'nin no fukō wo yorokobu).

Plato and Aristotle first stated the Superiority theory of humor, but it was later put in a stronger form by Hobbes (1588-1679). Hobbes states in Leviathan, Part I, ch. 6 that "Sudden glory, is the passion which makes those grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleases them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves in their favor by observing the imperfections of other men" (Morreal, 1987:20).

"The superiority theory is that the humor we find in comedy and life is based on ridicule, wherein we regard the object of amusement as inferior and/or ourselves as superior" (Bardon, 2005:463).

As in the explanations above, in this theory of humor, the feeling of superiority over the bad situations and misfortunes of others is essential.

In this study, the steps during the selection and analysis of the poems are given below.

First, topics that are seen as bad or defective in the poems are selected. Other than these, poems are excluded from the scope of the study. After, all poems (topics that are seen as bad or defective in the poems) discussed regarding meaning, which contain the superiority theory, are compiled. If there are no features of the theory of superiority in the collected poems, these poems are also excluded from the scope.

During the collecting poems, it is seen that there are two types of superiority theories in the poems. The poet depicts the bad and ridiculous characteristics of others that make the poet feel superior. Apart from this, the poet also ridicules his own negative and ridiculous traits, making the reader mock the poet and making reader feel superior to the poet. After that, they are categorized into related topics.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- How is the Superiority Theory of Humor handled in poems?
- What topics are seen in the poems, and what makes the poems humorous?

Discussion

Senryū is a very important genre of poetry in Japan. It often explores emotions and social issues relates to human with humor or satire. As mentioned above, people can express their true intentions (honno) through this type of poetry. There are also a large number of poetry competitions on various topics that continue to this day in Japan. This allows people not only to enjoy reading poems, but also to write poem themselves.

It can be considered as a mirror of Japanese culture and Japanese society in terms of reflecting the important events and people of the period in which it was written in poems. So, one can understood the condition of the Japan from the poems.

Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company organizes the senryū contest discussed in this study, a long-lasting competition still popular in Japan. This contest is held annually, and “the top 100” for each year is announced on the official website of Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company. Among the best 100 poems announced on the website, the best 10 poems are selected from the works and announced at the end of June. The company first organized this competition among its employees in 1987. Afterward, due to the intense interest, it became a competition anyone in Japan could attend since 1990. It has become very popular because it can be easily applied by online submission. Since this type of poetry contains humor or black humor, people can relax by announcing the feelings they cannot express in daily life using pseudonyms. The 38th competition will be held in October 2024, and the best 100 poems will be announced at the end of January 2025.

In this study, the Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company’s senryū competition poems dealing with the subject of the family were compiled from the years between 1990 and 2020 (30-year period). A total of 690 poems were analyzed. 479 (Four hundred seventy-nine) poems with the theory of superiority have been identified in these poems. This study's works, including the superiority theory, are most prominent due to their limitations.

The family relations related poems with the theory of superiority are listed under the following categories: Being behind the technology and trends, Physical features (being ugly, fat, dirty/unclean, etc.), and Character features (angry, strict, negligent, etc.).

Being behind the technology and trends

In Japan, it is observed that using a new word or a popular word about important events or media people. These words are expressed in Japanese by a new word (新語/shingo) and a popular word (流行語/ryūkōgo). The following poems contain popular or new words widely used in the year the works were written. Young generations know these words. However, the older generation cannot understand the latest trends, so they misunderstand them. This makes the poems humorous, and the reader who knows the real meaning of the trend words feels superior to others.

It is seen that the words such as “ゆるキャラ(yurukyara), 置き配(okihai), ありのまま(arinomama), J.Y. Park, YOASOBI, 4K, タピる(tapiru), セカチュウ(sekachū), SMAP, コンカツ(婚活)/konkatsu), サム・アムロ (Samu-Amuro), Facebook, アイフォン(Aifon), 岩盤浴(ganbanyoku), ・com(dottokomu), TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), Ipod, ユニクロ(yunikuro), セクハラ(sekuhara), じどり棒(jidoribō), オスプレイ(osupurei), デジカメ(dejikame), ナタ・デ・ココ(Nata-de-coco)” are included in the poems. These words refer to the critical events of the poem's written period, artist, etc. It is normal for popular words to be unknown, especially by older people. The person who writes the poem and the readers, who compare themselves with the elderly who do not know these words in the poems, feel superior and become happy that they understand their real meaning.

When the poems are analyzed, there are poems related to middle-aged individuals (mother, father, grandmother, husband, and grandfather) who do not know the meaning of the trend words. Those who know the meaning of these words feel superior as a reader. The works reflect the popular situations and events of the period. When the works are examined, the inability to keep up with time or technology is mentioned with the words "mother," "father," "parent," and "grandparents."

カーナビに「はい」と答えるうちの母 (初心車/2003)⁴

(Kānabi ni/ “hai” to kotaeru/ uchi no haha)

To the navigation/ who answers “yes” / my mother.

⁴ All translations in this article were done by the author. Poems are first given in their original forms (in Japanese) and then transcribed into English. Pseudonym and the year of poems are also shown in parentheses “(...)”.

This poem is about navigation and a mother unfamiliar with the latest technology. The mother's answer is accepted as anormal when the navigation begins to speak.

4Kで家賃いくらかと母が聞く (裕ちゃん/2015)

4K de/ yachin ikura to/ haha ga kiku

In 4K/ how much is the rent? / my mother asks.

In the poem, the abbreviation 'K' comes from the Greek word kilo, meaning a thousand (1000). So, 4K is equal to 4000. This abbreviation has frequently been used to show the number of followers on platforms, especially on social media (Instagram, etc.). The mother, who does not know this usage, perceives it as the K-word for house in Japanese. In Japan, the abbreviation for kitchen is 'K'. For example, 2 K means 'an apartment with two bedrooms and a kitchen.' So, the mother thinks 4 K is a type of apartment and asks about the rent.

ギガバイト時給いくらか孫に聞く (昭和残党/2019)

(Gigabaito/ jikyū ikura ka/ mago ni kiku)

“Gigabyte,” How much is the hourly pay? I asked my grandson.

The word “ギガバイト (*gigabaito*)” is used as a homophonic pun. It is a “unit of memory, GB.” But, “バイト” has the same pronunciation as the abbreviation word of “アルバイト,” which means a part-time job. So, in this poem, these words create humor.

セカチュウをポケモンと思ううちの父 (小太りおじさん/2005)

Sekachū wo/ Pokemon to omou/ uchi no chichi

Sekachū/ thinking as it's Pokemon/ my father.

セカチュウ is the abbreviation of the Japanese drama is 世界の中心で愛をさけぶ (*Sekai no chūshin de ai wo sakebu*), which is a 2004 Japanese drama. The English version is 'Crying Out Love in the Center of the World.' The word ピカチュウ (*pikachū*) is one of the characters of Pokémon, which has a similar pronunciation to *sekachū* in the poem.

コンカツはロースか? フィレ? かと父は聞き (のりちゃん)

Konkatsu wa/ rōsu ka? fire? ka to /chichi wa kiki (2009)

Is “konkatsu” a loin? fillet? Father asks.

コンカツ (婚活 /*konkatsu*) is defined as "Searching for a marriage partner; marriage hunting; activities leading to marriage (e.g., dating, courtship."⁵ And Another word, トンカツ (豚カツ/*tonkatsu*), is a similar-

⁵ <https://ejje.weblio.jp/> (11.10.2024)

sounding word which means “pork cutlet.” ロース (*rōsu*) is *pork loin; sirloin; roast*, and ファイレ (*fire*) is *fillet*.

図書館で Facebook をさがす父 (IT 難民/2011)

(*Toshokan de/ Facebook wo/ sagasu chichi*)

In the library/ Facebook/ Father searching.

The word "Facebook" provides humor in this poem. Facebook is a social media platform that allows someone to share photos, videos, or information by creating an account. In this poem, the father does not know the social media platform “Facebook.” The word “book” is used in the word Facebook and the sense of a book; the search in the library is discussed.

TPP どのアイドル父が言う (Yacchan/2013)

(*TPP/ doko no aidoru/ chichi ga iu TPP*)

Trans-Pacific Partnership/Where's the idol/ my father asks.

The abbreviation of “TPP” is “Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement.” Father does not know about it and thinks it is a Japanese idol. Japanese idol groups include AKB48, 2BACKKA, DRM, HKT48, etc.

TPP タバコパチンコパパ止めて! (毎月赤字ママ)

(*TPP/ tabako pachinko/ papa yamete!* (2011))

Trans-Pacific Partnership/tobacco pachinko/ papa stop!

The abbreviation TPP stands for Tobacco, Pachinko⁶, Papa Stop! It is an abbreviation of the initials of the *Trans-Pacific Partnership*.

YOASOBI が大好きと言い父あせる (テンピ/ 2020)

(*YOASOBI ga/ daisuki to ii/ chichi aseru*)

YOASOBI, when I say that I love/ Father is anxious.

Yoasobi is a Japanese pop group that dates back to 2019. The word 夜遊び (*yoasobi*) has the same pronunciation, and it means “nightlife.” In the poem, the father, who is not familiar with the J-pop group, mistakenly interprets the word “yoasobi” as “nightlife,” leading to a humorous misunderstanding.

洗顔フォーム知らぬ父親歯をみがく (ピチピチギャル)

(*Sengan fōmu/ shiranu chichioya/ ha wo migaku* (1991))

A father who doesn't know facial cleanser brushes his teeth.

⁶ Pachinko is a Japanese pinball game.

The father, who does not use cosmetic products much, only uses toothpaste at home. The poem uses the fact that the father mistook his daughter's menthol facial wash gel for toothpaste.

サム・アムロ? ハワイの人かと 聞くおやじ (モダンボーイ)

Samu amuro?/ Hawaii no hitoka to/ kiku oyaji (1997)

Sam- Amuro? Father asks if he is from Hawaii.

サム (*Samu*) is a dancer born in 1962. His real name is Maruyama Masaharu⁷ (丸山 正温/まるやま まさはる) , and his wife is called アムロ. The real name is *Amuro Namie* (安室 奈美恵/あむろ なみえ) , also a dancer. They married in 1997, the same year as the poem, and are called Sam-Amuro. But father thinks it is a name from Hawaii.

アイフォンをラブコールかと聞くおやじ (米寿の父)

Aifon wo/rabukōru ka to/ kiku oyaji (2013)

iPhone, Is it a love call? father asks.

The word pronounced as *aifon* above corresponds to two different words in Japanese. One is the iPhone, which is an Apple product. The other word is “愛フォン/愛phone) which has the same meaning as ラブコール (*rabukōru*), love call in English.

岩盤浴韓流スターかと聞く親父 (世間知らず)

Ganbanyoku/ Hanryū sutā ka to/ kiku oyaji (2006)

Bedrock bath/ Is it a Korean star? / father asks.

“*Ganbanyoku*,” which means bedrock bath in Japanese, has a similar pronunciation to the Korean name. That is why Father thinks of it as a Korean star.

ナタ・デ・ココどこを切るのと聞くオヤジ (オジサン代表)

Nata de koko/ doko wo kiru no to/ kiku oyaji (1993)

Nata de coco, where to cut? Father asks.

Nata de coco is a coconut drink in Japan. This drink became popular the year the poem was written. The word *nata* means hatchet, sax, and *koko* means here. “*Nata de koko*,” translated into English, means “*Here with the sax.*”

ユニクロはどんな黒かとオヤジ聞き (流行オンチ)

Unikuro wa/ donna kuro ka to/ oyaji kiki (2000)

Uniqlo/What kind of black? / Father asks.

⁷ In this study, Japanese personal names are written with the surname first and then the first name according to Japanese rules.

The word "クロ (*kuro*)" means black in Japanese. The word "Uniqlo" is pronounced *yunikuro* in Japanese. In the poem, the father thinks of this word as a shade of black.

i P o d すぐに沸くかと 祖母が聞く (アッパレ)

Ipod/ sugu ni waku ka to/ sobo ga kiku (2008)

Ipod/ will it boil soon? / Grandmother asks.

The similarity of the words "ipod" and "pot" makes for humor. Pot⁸ means "a deep round container used for cooking things in," and "Ipod" is a "portable media player, a product of Apple Inc."

置き配を不審物だと騒ぐ祖母 (うー婆いーつ)

Okihai wo/ fushinbutsu da to/ sawagu sobo (2020)

Delivery/ it is a suspicious item/my grandmother makes a fuss.

置き配 (*okihai*) is frequently used when the coronavirus was common. To prevent the transmission of the virus, the package you received was left at your address. When the grandmother, behind the times, looks at the package left at the door, she worries, thinking that it is a suspicious item.

じいちゃんに J.Y. Park の場所聞かれ (けえぽっふ)

Jīchan ni/ J.Y. Park no/ basho kikare (2020)

Grandpa asks me where J.Y. Park is.

Park Jin-young (born in 1971) is a Korean singer, songwriter, and reality television judge. He is also known by the stage names "The Asiansoul," "J.Y. Park," and the initials JYP." His grandfather does not know about it and thinks of it as the park's name.

おじいちゃんノラクロじゃないユニクロ (おばあちゃん/2001)

Ojīchan/Norakuro janai/Yunikuro yo

Grandpa/ it is not Norakuro; it is Uniqlo.

Norakuro is a Japanese manga series published in 1931. And Uniqlo is a well-known Japanese clothes manufacturer. Grandfather misunderstood Uniqlo and thought it was a Japanese manga character, Norakuro.

デジカメのエサはなんだと孫に聞く (浦島太郎/2001)

Dejikame no/ esa wa nan da to/ mago ni kiku

What is the food of/ digital camera is/ asked to grandchild.

デジカメ (*dejikame*) is an abbreviation of デジタルカメラ (digital camera). カメ (*kame/亀*) means "turtle" in English. So, grandfather, who does

⁸ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english> (11.10.2024)

not know this, thinks “dejikame” is a kind of “turtle” and asks his grandchild to forage it.

In the poems given as an example above, the inability to understand the popular words of the period is seen as superiority.

Physical features (being fat, being under the beauty standards, being dirty/unclean, etc.)

People take pleasure in the bad physical characteristics of others. In the poems mentioned below, white-collar working men are not satisfied with the physical characteristics of their wives. They reflect this in the poems.

When the poems are analyzed, the wife is depicted as fat and compared to the fat mascot character in Japan. The other issue is the change in the physical characteristics of the wife after marriage. As time passes, the wife is not seen as beautiful by her husband. Moreover, they are hardly recognized by family members when they are without makeup. Although the fathers wrote the works, it is seen that they use the word "mother" from the point of view of their children when talking about their wives.

Here, the fact that physical characteristics are not liked or bad (being fat and not meeting the beauty standards) is considered superior by the poet and by the readers. Both the poet and the reader feel happy that they are not in a bad situation like in the poems.

ゆるキャラのおなか指差しママみたい(ヒントちゃん)

Yurukyara no/ onaka yubisashi/ mama mitai (2012)

It's like mom pointing at the tummy of a mascot.

ゆるキャラ (*yurukyara*) means “costumed mascot character (oft. devised for PR purposes by local governments, government departments, etc.)” It generally looks like a big and fat character. The man thinks his wife is fat in the poems and compares her to this fat mascot character.

ゆるキャラをつつき娘がパパと呼ぶ(じんろく/2013)

Yurukyara wo/ tsutsuki musume ga/ papa to yobu

Daughter pokes the mascot and calls Daddy.

In most works, the person is depicted as fat, and the mascot is the mother of the family. However, in the poem above, it is seen that he is the father.

ゆるキャラと思えば愛しい肥えた妻(毎日頑'バリ'父さん)

Yurukyara to/ omoeba itoshī/ koeta tsuma (2012)

If you think of it as a mascot, it is a lovely, fat wife.

In this poem, the wife is compared to a fat mascot.

乗る妻も体重計も悲鳴上げ(マモちゃん/2012)

Noru tsuma mo/ taijūkei mo/ himeiage

Both scream, the scale and the wife who steps on it.

It is stated that the poet's wife screams when she steps on the scale because she is overweight, and the scale also screams because she is an overweight person who steps on it.

うちの妻マツコよりもデラックス(掲点肥え)

Uchi no tsuma/ Matsuko yori mo/ derakkusu (2014)

My wife is more deluxe than Matsuko.

Matsuko Deluxe is (born in 1972) a Japanese television personality. Matsuko looks overweight, so her husband compares the wife with Matsuko. The wife is also considered fat in this poem.

Detoxing is one of the methods used to lose weight. The poem below is about detox.

デトックス言う妻体型デラックス(ネクタイよれよれ)

Detokkusu/ iu tsuma taikai/ derakkusu (2010)

Wife who says detox, her body type is deluxe.

This poem discusses that although his wife says detox to lose weight, her body is overweight. The word Deluxe is related to Matsuko Deluxe, also in the previous work, and is used to mean fat.

スピンで我が子を抱けば泣きやまず(へチマ)

Suppin de/ wagako wo dakeba/ nakiyamazu (2006)

When I hold my child without makeup, she/he cannot stop crying.

In the works below, the wife is subject to beauty standards. She is beautiful when she wears makeup, and the children cannot recognize her or cry out when she does not.

妻の顔昔モナリザ今ムンク(夫のさけび/2005)

Tsuma no kao/ mukashi Monariza/ ima Munku

My wife's face, before Mona Lisa, now Munch.

The wife's face has previously been likened to the Mona Lisa, which means she looks noble and beautiful. However, it is later stated that it is terrible, as in Edward Munch's "The Scream." The pseudonym, which is the husband's scream (夫のさけび/*otto no sakebi*), also indicates that he has a scary wife.

スッピンでプールに入り子が迷子 (アジ/2012)

Suppin de/ pūru ni hairi/ ko ga maigo

When entering the pool without makeup, the child gets lost.

ありのままメイク落とせばどこのママ? (業界の三男坊)

Arinomama/ meiku otoseba/ doko no mama? (2014)

As it is, if you remove makeup, who is the mama?

スッピンはダメヨダメダメママじゃない (ぬりかべ)

Suppin wa/ dame yo damedame/ mama janai (2014)

No makeup, no way, no, no, not mother.

参観日母のメイクに子がビビり (舞姫)

Sankanbi/ haha no meiku ni/ ko ga bibiri (1996)

School visit/ child is scared by mom's makeup.

結婚の写真見た子が『ママはどこ?』 (七年ママ)

Kekkon no/ shashin mita ko ga/ mama wa doko? (1997)

Child who saw wedding photo: 'Where is mom?'

In the poems above, the topics relate to the mother and makeup. The mother will not be recognized when she is without makeup, and the child is afraid of wearing too much makeup by the mother.

Characteristic features (anger, strictness, selfishness, negligence, etc.)

People want to be loved by everyone and not be mistreated. However, when someone else is maltreated, they are happy that they did not experience it themselves and feel superior. The wife/mother character is depicted with negative characteristics such as anger, strict attitude, selfishness, and negligence in the poems.

おそろすなママのいかりはパパにくる (ベスパパ)

Okorosuna/ mama no ikari wa/ papa ni kuru (2010)

Don't make angry/ mom's anger comes to daddy.

In the poems, most of which have been written by salaried employees, it is determined that family members ignore them. Even the pets (cats, dogs, etc.) do not value the salaryman; thus, he generally feels lonely. Unfortunately, he is portrayed as a salaryman who has no relaxing place that belongs to him at work, on the train, or even at home.

妻が見る「きょうの料理」明日もでず(グルメ老)

Tsuma ga miru/'kyō no ryōri' /ashita mo dezu (2008)

My wife watches 'Today's Cuisine' but won't cook tomorrow either.

The poet complains about his wife, who watches the “きょうの料理 /Today's Cuisine television cooking program every day. But the wife does not make the meal of the day tomorrow either.

「今帰る」妻から返信「まだいいよ」(えむ)

Ima kaeru/ tsuma kara henshin/ mada ii yo (2007)

“I'm going home now,” replied my wife. “It is still good.”

「俺も行く」言ったら止めた妻の旅 (堂二科志太朗)

'Ore mo iku/' ittara yameta/ tsuma no tabi (2012)

When I said, "I'm going too," My wife's trip stopped.

This poem is about the husband's desire to come on his wife's trip. It is stated that the wife did not want to go on a trip with her husband, so she canceled it.

光りもの妻はダイヤでオレさんま (貧富)

Hikari mono/ tsuma wa daiya de/ ore sanma (2012)

Shiny thing, for my wife it is a diamond, for me saury.

The difference in the living standards of the wife and the husband is remarkable. While the husband lives a poor life, the wife lives in luxury.

It's nice to have friends and family members around people. However, it is seen that there is a theme of loneliness in the works below. In the following poems, the poet states that there is no one around him and he does not feel that he belongs anywhere. So, the situation of being lonely is the object of the feeling superior in these poems.

マイホーム持ったがないぞマイルーム (夢追い人)

Maihōmu/ motta ga nai zo/ mai rūmu (2010)

Although I have a home, I do not have a room.

会社でも家でも燃えない粗大ゴミ (氷上今上)

Kaisha de mo/ ie de mo moenai/sodaigomi (1990)

I am a non-burnable bulky garbage at the company and home.

俺もだよ何も言えねえこの家じゃ (浮き草)

Ore mo da yo/ nani mo ienē/ kono ie ja

Me too; I cannot say anything in this house.

土地もある家もあるのに居場所なし (恐妻家人)
Tochi mo aru/ ie mo aru no ni/ ibasho nashi (2000)
I have land and a house, but no place to live.

席がない会社も家も電車でも (透明人間⁹)
Seki ga nai/ kaisha mo ie mo/ densha de mo (2016)
No seat, at the company, at home, even train.

我が家では言うこと聞くのスマホだけ (会津小心隊)
Wagaya dewa/ iu koto kiku no/ sumaho dake (2013)
At home, the only thing listens me is my smartphone.

The Salaryman does not feel like he belongs anywhere at work or home. He has no right to make serious decisions about the family in the house and complains that his household does not listen to him. He feels like oversized trash that is not important to family members.

父さんのお腹で試す賞味期限 (明るい我が家)
Tōsan no/ onaka de tamesu/ shōmikigen (1994)
Testing the expiration date in Dad's stomach.

我が家でも「温めますか」と飯が出る (ツネパパ)
Wagaya de mo/ 'atatamemasu ka' to/ meshi ga deru (2015)
Even at home, rice is served “Do you want to warm it up?”

In Japan, small markets called konbini are open 24 hours a day. Ready-made meals are sold in these markets. Due to the presence of a microwave, it is possible to heat the ready-made menu. The store employee asks, “Do you want to heat?” while taking the order. His wife buys ready-made food for home instead of cooking and asks her husband in the same way as the store employee. It is understood that his wife does not prepare good food at home or care about the dishes at home for her husband.

パパ来てよ必要だったの指紋だけ (iPhone使い)
Papa kiteyo/ hitsuyō datta no/ shimon dake (2017)
Daddy, come on, all she needs is a fingerprint?

It is understood that family members neglect white-collar employees who play the role of father or husband and do not have the right to speak in the family.

⁹ “The invisible man” is the pseudonym of this poem.

俺の席いつの間にやら犬の席 (単身プロ)
Ore no seki/ itsunomani yara/ inu no seki (2013)
My seat, without noticing, became the dog's seat.

子の次と思っていたのに犬の次 (イヒママパパ)
Ko no tsugi to/ omotteita no ni/ inu no tsugi
I thought it was after the child, but it was after the dog.

お犬様 俺の四倍 床屋代 (ナナハン親父)
Oinusama/ ore no yon bai/ tokoyadai (2019)
Dear dog, it is four times more expensive than my barber's fee.

ただいまの声にペットも軽く無視(ビール大好きマーちゃん)
Tadai ma no/ koe ni petto mo/ karuku mushi (2013)
To my voice, "I am home," pet also lightly ignores me.

ただいまは犬に言うなよオレに言え (さらば地球)
Tadai ma wa/ inu ni iuna yo/ ore ni ie (2009)
Tell me, do not say "I'm home" to the dog.

ペットより俺にみせろよその笑顔 (ひかげの夫)
Petto yori/ ore ni misero yo/ sono egao (1998)
Show me a smile rather than a pet.

ペットより安い服着て散歩する (光かんじ)
Petto yori/ yasui fuku kite/ sanpo suru (2003)
Wear cheaper clothes than a pet and take a walk.

腑に落ちないペットと俺の生活差 (いいなり夫)
Fu ni ochinai/ petto to ore no/ seikatsusa (2005)
Cannot understand the difference in lifestyle between me and pet.

まえは犬いまはスマホに話しかけ (みっちー)
Mae wa inu/ ima wa sumaho ni/ hanashikake (2018)
Before, it was a dog; now, I am speaking with a smartphone.

A pet is more valuable than a salaryman. The poet considers himself less valuable than the dog in the house. He states that even the dog ignores him, and the living standards of the dog are more luxurious than himself. By comparing himself with the poet, the reader feels superior and despises the poet.

退職金もらった瞬間妻ドローン ((元自衛官)

Taishokukin/ moratta shunkan/ tsuma dorōn (2015)

The moment I received my retirement allowance, my wife caught it.

「援助して」妻に頼んだ「交際費」(イケナイ中年)

'Enjo shite'/ tsuma ni tanonda/ 'kōsaihi' (1997)

“Help,” I asked my wife for “entertainment expenses.”

ともかせぎ妻の貯金は何故増える(金欠症¹⁰)

Tomokasegi/ tsuma no chokin wa/ naze fueru (1995)

Both are working. Why does my wife's savings increase?

五億円我が家で貯めれば五億年(まりも)

Go oku en/ wagaya de tamereba/ go oku nen (1992)

If we save 500 million yen in our home, it will take 500 million years.

妻とするボーナス交渉手取りなし(読み人知らず¹¹)

Tsuma to suru/ bōnasu kōshō/ tedorī nashi (2008)

Bonus negotiations with wife without take-home pay.

Although the salaryman earns money by working with difficulty and in a stressful work environment, he gives all the money he earns to his wife. He lives on a minimal amount of money. The wife even begrudges her husband's pocket money.

The father/husband in the family is considered unclean and dirty. For this reason, family members wash their father/husband's underwear or laundry separately. The air freshener (*Febreze*) is sprayed on the father/husband because he smells bad. This causes readers to feel superior because readers are not in a bad situation like this.

父の日に香水ではなくファブリーズ(ひらめ)

Chichi no hi ni/ kōsui dewanaku/ faburīzu (2007)

Febreze, instead of perfume for Father's Day.

ひどい妻寝ている俺にファブリーズ(冷てえ¹²!)

Hidoi tsuma/ neteiru ore ni/ faburīzu (2014)

My terrible wife sprays Febreze on me while sleeping.

¹⁰ Money deficiency disease.

¹¹ Unknown reader.

¹² Cold.

父さんの下着どうして排除する (洗濯機)

Tōsan no/ shitagi dōshite/ haijo suru (2017)

Why is the dad's pants excluded?

付度し娘と別に洗濯し (シムラー)

Sontaku shi/ musume to betsu ni/ sentaku shi (2017)

Consideration, wash separately from my daughter.

一番湯パパの後には入浴剤 (マムシ)

Ichibanyu/ papa no ato ni wa/ nyūyokuzai (2007)

First bath, after father, add bath salt.

許される仏は三度妻一度 (湘南おじん)

Yurusareru/ Butsu wa san do/ tsuma ichi do (2009)

The Buddha is forgiven three times, and my wife forgives one time.

The wife is depicted as an authoritarian and strict character. The salaryman does not know how to react to his wife. His wife is considered even more stringent than the Buddha and constantly talks and complains.

読みきれぬ妻の心と円と株 (ポチの父)

Yomikirenu/ tsuma no kokoro to/ en to kabu (2012)

I cannot read my wife's heart, yen, and stocks.

予知不能妻の怒りの時期と規模 (地震予報士¹³)

Yochifunō tsumano ikari no/ jiki to kibo (2006)

Unpredictable timing and extent of wife's anger.

妻の愚痴 ブブゼラよりも 耳障り (洗濯パパ)

Tsuma no guchi/ bubuzera yori mo/ mimizawari (2010)

The wife's complaining is more jarring than vuvuzela.

スマートフォン妻と同じで操れず (妻一とフォン)

Sumātofon/ tsuma to onaji de/ ayatsurezu (2011)

Smartphone, just like my wife, I cannot control.

妻が言う「承知しました」聞いてみたい (大魔神)

Tsuma ga iu/ "shōchi shimashita" /kītemitai (2011)

My wife says, "I understand." It means "I will ask later."

¹³ Earthquake forecaster.

リモコンを向けても下がらぬ妻の声 (エコ減声)
Rimokon wo/ muketemo sagaranu/ tsuma no koe (2010)
My wife's voice won't go down even when I point the remote at her.

ついて来い今では妻について行く (来行)
Tsuitekoi/ ima de wa tsuma ni/ tsuiteiku (2002)
Follow me; now I'm going to follow my wife.

守ろうと誓った嫁から身を守る (恐妻家)
Mamorō to/ chikatta yome kara/ mi wo mamoru (2016)
Protect myself from the bride I swore to protect.

怖いのは地震津波にテロと妻 (はずれた親父¹⁴)
Kowaino wa jishin tsunami ni tero to tsuma (2005)
What scares me is the earthquake, tsunami, terrorism, and my wife.

妻よりもやさしくおこす駅員さん (恐妻亭主¹⁵)
Tsuma yori mo yasashiku okosu eki'in san (1994)
The station staff wakes me up more gently than my wife.

As can be seen in the examples above, the theory of superiority, which constitutes the laughing mechanism in the poems is very important. Senryū is considered as a comic verse, so it is important to make the reader laugh. That is why the poet shows the shortcomings of the characters in the poems. The feeling of superiority or triumph comes to people when someone discovers misfortune, clumsiness, incompetence in others.

Conclusions

Senryū, a Japanese genre of humorous poetry, originated in the 18th century and is still very popular today. This genre of poetry is famous for the presence of humorous elements in it. The theory of superiority is one of the oldest and most common theories of humor. It is the feeling of superiority because of not being the object of bad things that happen to others and the laughter that results in the end. As a result, two types of superiority theories are evident in senryū poems. First, the poet feels superior when discussing someone else's bad situation or shortcomings in his poems. The other is to

¹⁴ The distant father.

¹⁵ The husband who is afraid of the wife.

create humor by reflecting on his life's missing or erroneous aspects in poems and making the reader feel superior.

All ages and genders from Japan can participate to this senryū competition. When the poems are analyzed, it is seen that they are primarily written by white-collar working man (salaryman), as the older name of this competition is Salaryman senryū. Mostly, white-collar men depict their family relations with their wives and children humorously.

In most of the poems the poet is dissatisfied with his wife's appearance and does not find her beautiful. He also emphasizes that she becomes gorgeous when she wears makeup. He also sees his wife as an overweight person, and her characteristic features are depicted as angry, strict, and neglectful of her husband.

In the other side belonging is another main problem. And the poet does not feel that he belongs anywhere. Everyone at work and home neglects him. The poet is ignored by their family members and even by the cats and dogs they keep at home.

As a conclusion, deficiencies, mistakes, and being physically and characteristically in a bad condition in daily life reveal humor in the poems. When a normal situation or event is expressed, readers do not perceive it as humor. The bad situations others experience in various subjects trigger the poet and the reader to compare themselves and feel superior.

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