

Story generation during appreciating an artwork based on an actual tale (Ugetsu-monogatari)

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Abstract

In this paper, I will show a result of an experiment. The experiment was conducted using an artwork based on an actual tale (Ugetsu-monogatari). Actually the tale is rather old one. I have been conducting experiments to know how people can generate stories from the artworks. Previously I did not use artworks based on actual tales. Only the exception was artworks based on "Alice in Wonderland." These artworks were used to see how Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) functions during art appreciation. Of course in the experiment, we asked participants to generate stories. However, in this experiment, I tried to see the process of the story generation during art appreciation.

Keywords: Art appreciation, Ugetsu Monogatari, Story generation

1. Introduction

We have been studying how to help art viewers during art appreciation ([9], [10], [11], [12], [1]). Since sometimes it is rather difficult especially for the novice viewers to understand and enjoy abstract artworks, with a curation, we tried to help viewers' art experiences.

As Leder et al. suggested [7], [8], information may help the viewers in an art appreciation. How can we measure the level of understanding of viewers? One strategy is to make viewers to generate stories in the artworks. Previously we conducted such an experiment [1], [12], [13], [4], [5]. However, in the experiments, we did not use artworks based on actual tales. Only the exception was artworks based on "Alice in Wonderland" [13]. These artworks were used to see how Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) functions during art appreciation. In the experiment, we asked participants to generate stories. However, our main purpose was to see how the others' opinion would influence one's art appreciation. In this paper, I will show the experiment that was conducted by using an artwork based on an actual tale (Ugetsu-monogatari).

In this experiment, I tried to see the process of the story generation during art appreciation. Accordingly I offered information in several levels. My hypothesis is that the level of understanding will be improved according to the quality or quantity of given information. In the following sections, I will show the experiment, its results, and my analysis.

2. Experiment

My hypothesis is that the level of understanding artworks will be improved according to the quality or quantity of given information. I think that the level of understanding can be measured by generated story of the artworks.

Therefore, I conducted an experiment in order to determine which factor (information) will change the viewers' viewpoint in an art appreciation. In the previous papers [2], [3], we analysed the results only from the score of the value and preference of artworks. However, in this paper, I will show the change of participants' viewpoint of the artwork. For that, we asked the participants to generate a story of the artwork.

2.1. Participants

Participants were 20 adults including university students and aged person and their age were from 19 to 58 years old. Number of females was 8 and that of males was 12. Their naked visions or corrected visions were normal. First, all the participants were asked to answer about their art education background.



Fig. 1. Experiment

Then, main questions followed.

2.2. Stimuli

The experiment was conducted in a lecture room in Chuo University on June 3, 2022. I used an artwork created in 1970 as a stimuli. The artist is Donge Kobayashi (小林ドンゲ) (1926–). The title of the artwork is “Dear my lover, now, let’s go together (いとしいお前よさあ一緒に行こう).” The artwork was placed in front of the participants like Figure 1. The participants could look at the artwork closely.

2.3. Method

All participants answered the questions on the worksheet during appreciating the artwork. The questions were as follows;

- Question 1: About this artwork, please write freely what you think, what you feel, and a story in the artwork. And please make a title of the artwork.

- 1.1 Do you like such an artwork?

All evaluations are conducted by using the SD (Semantic Differential) method with the score of 1 to 5. For instance, the score 1 for dislike, the score 5 for like and the score 3 for neutral. The score 1 for value is low and the score 5 for value is high.

- 1.2 Why do you evaluate so?

- 2.1 How much do you understand the story of the artwork?

- 2.2 Why do you evaluate so?

- 3.1 How much are you interested in the artwork?

- 3.2 Why do you evaluate so?

I showed the information such as a name and a history of the artist. In addition, I showed the title and techniques of the artwork. Then I asked the questions as follows;

- Question 2: Please make stories in the artwork with referring to the information. Does the above information influence your mind?

In addition, the same questions such as the above (1.1–3.2) followed.

I showed information like “this artwork was created as an attached of Ugetsu-monogatari (雨月物語) by Shusei Ueda (上田秋成).” Then I showed the story in original language and the story translated into the current language. In addition I showed a very short abstract of the story. Then I asked the questions as follows;

- Question 3: Which part of the story the artwork draws? Please write impressions of the artwork and changes in mind after reading the information as many as you can.

In addition, the same questions such as the above (1.1–3.2) followed.

- the last question: If you change your mind after obtaining the information, please write down. For

instance, a content or a story in the artwork. Do you like or dislike the artwork?

At the last, please write the opinion to the experiment. For instance, you needed more time, and the selection of the artwork was bad, etc. If you conduct this type of experiment, you will ask the other questions...

The duration of the experiment was about 30 minutes, for one artwork, it will be longer than the previous experiments.

3. Result and Discussions

From the results in [9], we observed that frequent museum visitors tended to answer that information about artist’s life, historical background and theme of the artwork were helpful. We also observed that many non-frequent museum visitors felt information about techniques used in the artwork was helpful. Findlay [6] pointed out five attributes (Provenance, Condition, Authenticity, Exposure, Quality) must be known for determination the value of artworks. However, since most of artworks were obtained in the primary market, factor as provenance will not be considered. Therefore, in the experiment, we prepared information about techniques and artist’s history. In this paper, I will analyse the result without considering participants’ artistic education. The following answers were originally written in Japanese,

3.1. Answers to the Question 1

egard a boy as a girl. Actually he seems a girl. Accordingly they made stories from the context of love of male and female. For instance, some participants described as follows:

- A

I feel a dark image close to a death. And I feel his/her facial expression is dark. Not from his/her facial expression, but from the existence of a skeleton I image a death. In addition, since I see the fact that he/she is surrounded by flowers, and a skeleton exists, I image a death.

- B

A person whom she has been seeing (she has loved) goes away (perhaps the person is described as a skeleton, so the person is dead?), so she has been sad. The scene her hair is wrapped up implies that she wants to be embraced by the person. The person reminds that they walked around a park with a flower garden with being blown by the wind... their hair flowing in the breeze.... Then the person wake up in the morning after dreaming the person wants to meet her again.

Most of participants referred to the skeleton and flowers. Actually they thought the boy as a girl. So they

generated stories from the context of love. They felt the situation of the death but generated romantic and sad stories.

3.2. Answers to the Question 2

• A

The title “Now let’s go together” was what the skeleton said to the female. Then I strengthen my interpretation that the artwork implicates a death. From the fact that a calling such as “Now” is spoken and from the facial expression of the female, I feel the sad impression of a death.

• B

I changed my mind. -> In the question 1, the main person is a girl in the left. However, after reading the question 2, the main person changes to a “skeleton” in the right. I cannot see the facial expression of the skeleton, accordingly various imaginations emerged. That is, I changed point of view from that the skeleton is a dead man to that it is a symbolic living male.

I offered a profile of the artist and the title of the artwork. Some participants created the new stories such that a person bring his lover to the world of death. Anyway stories are still a love between male and female. In addition, still they feel a death situation.

3.3. Answers to the Question 3

• A

I changed my interpretation that the person I thought a female was a boy, and the person I thought a skeleton was a monk in the Daichu-ji (大中寺) temple. Because I thought that the artist expressed the skeleton as after the death of the boy, monk in the Daichu-ji temple losing a power of live transformed into a demon. The boy died and the monk is still living. However, the artist drew in an opposite way. I felt that this artwork contains a theme that the problem is that in our life, a soul is more important than a body.

• B

I changed my imagination; The female in the left is expressed as “a female whose gender is twisted.” -> The female transformed into a demon and finally was dead like a skeleton.

Finally the participants were aware that a girl they thought is a male (monk). Of course they change their stories. In this phase, they read a whole story. Some of them understand the context behind the artwork, then accept the artwork. But some cannot accept the artwork. The artist expresses this story as a passion in the end of the century. Accordingly the artwork becomes somewhat uncomfortable, unusual and extraordinary. I think her artworks seems like style of Odilon Redon.

3.4. Answers to the last question

• A

From the beginning, it is difficult to read the story of the artwork. For me, the artwork is very interesting. Because after obtaining the true story, I changed my interpretation. After feeling the artist’s intention, I remember to go to the 21st century museum of contemporary art, Kanazawa (金沢21世紀美術館) in this spring. In the museum, some artworks were not provided artists’ intention nor background of the artworks. It is my personal opinion.... it will be good to compare the background story with my own interpretation during an art appreciation.

• B

The story is unrealistic. (It is rare for me to read this type of novel.) This artwork symbolically expresses the extraordinary situation. The artwork is drawn one scene of the story. In a certain sense, I understand the situation. -> The fact that the artwork expresses the unrealistic matters means that it contains a considerable stories. If this were an artwork drawn by, for instance, Picasso, it would not contain a story or be regarded as a completely different level of artwork. As for an artwork such as this, items (skeleton, flower, hair, female...) constructing an artwork have a certain meaning. I feel the depth and the texture of the context again.

Some participants said that the story was very difficult. Actually, this story was written in from 1768 to 1776. That is, it can be regarded as classic. I offered a story translated into modern Japanese, in addition. But the story itself is rather different from sense of people in younger generation. An opinion that is interesting is; since this artwork is composed of certain shapes (a human, a skeleton, and flowers can be recognized), if the story is added, no effect of story is shown. If this artwork were more abstract, they could capture the content differently according to the given story. This opinion seems interesting. We may consider the opinion. Previously we found the similar phenomenon in the appreciation of artwork by Jean Fautrier [9]. The artwork is an abstract artwork. A certain participant after reading the title (Fo^{er}et (forest)), the participant could create a story “I found a fairy in a forest.” in the context of a forest.

3.5. Discussion

My hypothesis is that the level of understanding will be improved according to the given information. The above results are, in a sense, very interesting. Most of participants pay attention to the skeleton and the flowers. In addition, first, they thought the boy as a girl. Then the first impression was love. However, according to the existence of the skeleton, they also felt a death story. After obtaining the title of the artwork, a certain

participant noticed the calling such as “Now” is spoken, he/she thought the artwork implicated a death situation. By this phase, the participants read the story from the aspect of death and love. After obtaining the whole story, most of the participants changed their mind. Because the person whom they thought was a girl was actually a monk, and the person whom they thought was a skeleton was actually a boy. They read the artwork in the context of creepy and scared. The effect of information is very clear in this experiment. However, the problem is that the story is very difficult to read and extraordinary.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I conducted the experiment to see whether the level of understanding would be improved according to the given information. My hypothesis was that the level of understanding will be improved according to the quality or quantity of the given information.

I used an artwork created in 1970 as stimuli. The artist is Donge Kobayashi (小林ドンゲ) (1926--). The artwork is not so abstract. The participants can recognize what are drawn in it. However, it may rather symbolic. Because it contains a lot of items such as flowers and a skeleton. They may not be an attribution of European artworks. However they may contain certain meanings. The result is as follows;

After obtaining the title of the artwork, a certain participant noticed the calling such as “Now” is spoken, he/she thought the artwork implicated a death situation. By this phase, the participants read the story from the aspect of death and love. Finally, after obtaining the whole story, most of the participants changed their mind. Because the person whom they thought was a girl was actually a monk, and the person whom they thought was a skeleton was actually a boy. They read the artwork in the context of creepy and scared. Thus according to the given information, participants might change their thinking to the artwork. The result is very interesting from a view point of a narrative generation. Because I could observe the change of a thinking procedure and a story generation in the art appreciation.

A problem is that I used a rather classic novel and it is rather extraordinary. Accordingly for some participants, it is difficult to read the novel. In the future experiment, I have to select a more readable and normal story.

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Authors Introduction

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He received an M.E. and Doctor of Engineering (PhD) from the University of Tokyo in 1988 and 1991 respectively. His main research interests are abduction, analogical reasoning, data mining, Chance Discovery, curation and language sense processing (rather emotional aspects of language processing). He worked in NTT Communication Science Laboratories from 1991 to 2000, After that, he worked several places, and he moved to Faculty of Letters, Chiba University in April 2012. Since then he is a full professor of Chiba University.
