Emotional expressions in L1 and L2 English writing

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This study observed the similarities and differences in emotional expressions regarding L1 and L2 English writing and investigated the correlation between the proficiency level regarding emotional expressions and TOEIC scores. Production experiments were carried out to investigate the usage of emotional expressions by 12 native speakers of English and 11 Japanese college students. The two groups of subjects were instructed to write two kinds of personal letters: a love letter and a letter of condolence. We counted words per T-Unit and analyzed the patterns of the letters. Also, five readers evaluated the letters produced by the Japanese learners of English, using the ESL Composition Profile. The results showed high correlations between the TOEIC scores and the scores of the ESL Composition Profile. We also observed different features in the patterns of the letters written by the native speakers of English and those by the Japanese learners respectively.

　L1およびL2ライティングの感情表現における類似点と相違点を観測し、感情表現の習得度とTOEICスコアの相関関係を検討するため、英語母語話者12名と日本人英語学習者11名を被験者とし生成実験を実施した。被験者全員に同じ条件下でラブレターとお悔やみの手紙を英語で書いてもらい、日本人英語学習者の手紙と米語母語話者の手紙を比較した。生成された資料（手紙）に関して、T-Unit内の単語数を算出し、手紙のパターンを分析した。また、5人の評価者が日本人被験者によって書かれた手紙を読み、ESL Composition Profileを用いて採点した。TOEICスコアとESL Composition Profileの評価結果には高い相関関係が示され、日本人英語学習者による手紙には英語母語話者による手紙に観察されるパターンとは異なるパターンが観測された。

I n research on L2 writing, the factors contributing to L2 writing ability have been the subjects of studies. According to Sasaki and Hirose (1996), among L2 proficiency, L1 writing ability and meta-knowledge of L2 writing, L2 proficiency played a major role in explaining L2 writing ability, while L1 writing ability was the next, and meta-knowledge was in third place. In this study, we focused on the factors contributing to L2 writing ability, specifically L2 proficiency.

The domain of human emotions is important for humankind. This research domain is very controversial because there seem to be hardly any objective methods for evaluating or comparing emotions intersubjectively or interculturally. Human emotions have not been examined systematically in various academic fields (Niemeier & Dirven, 1997). To the authors' knowledge, no empirical study focusing on the emotional expressions produced by Japanese learners of English is available in the literature.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: to find out the similarities and differences in English emotional expressions regarding L1 and L2 acquisition; and to investigate the correlation between the proficiency level regarding emotional expressions and the English proficiency measured by TOEIC. We employed the concept of T-Unit introduced by Hunt (1965) to analyze the complexity of sentences. Also, we employed the ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacobs, et al. (1981) to evaluate writing proficiency.

Methods
Subjects

The subjects in this experiment were 12 native speakers of English (seven males and five females) and 11 Japanese learners of English (four males and seven females). All of the Japanese learners were undergraduate students at Juntendo University majoring in health and sports science. They were selected based on their English abilities measured by TOEIC. Their scores were higher than 500 (Highest: 940, Lowest: 540, Average score: 648, Highest of Reading Section: 450, Lowest of Reading Section: 235, Average score of Reading Section: 289).

Procedures

Among the emotions, we selected "affection" and "condolence," which can be conceived as important emotions for L2 learners. All the subjects were instructed to write two kinds of personal letters: a love letter and a letter of condolence. The following prompts were given in English to the native English speakers and in English and Japanese to the Japanese learners:

Task 1 (Love Letter)

Directions: Suppose you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend with whom you have been going out for 3 years. Today is your third anniversary. Please write a love letter to her/him and express your current feelings.

Task 2 (Letter of Condolence)

Directions: Suppose you have a teacher who had been taking good care of you until you entered the university. You have just heard that the teacher suddenly passed away. You cannot attend the funeral because of your schedule. Please write a letter of condolence to the teacher's family and express your current feelings.

When the subjects wrote the letters, the format and length were not restricted. The subjects were free to express how they were feeling. They could take notes and use a dictionary if necessary. However, they were not allowed to refer to how-to books on letter writing.

We counted the total number of words per T-Unit. The T-Unit (minimal terminable unit), which was introduced by Hunt (1965), is a measure of the linguistic complexity of sentences, defined as the shortest unit which a sentence can be reduced to, and consisting of one independent clause together with whatever dependent clauses are attached to it (Richards, et al. 1992, p.390). A sentence has one T-Unit when one or more clauses are embedded in an independent clause (e.g., I couldn't go to school yesterday because I had a cold). On the other hand, a sentence has two (or more) T-Units when independent clauses are conjoined (e.g., I had a cold yesterday, so I couldn't go to school). The T-Unit was originally designed to evaluate the syntactic maturity of sentences in the writing of grade-school children learning English as their L1, but it has been widely used in L2 research as well.

In addition, we analyzed and compared the patterns of the letters between the Japanese learners and the native speakers of English. The use of exclamatory sentences, comparative sentences, and superlative sentences was also analyzed because they can be conceived as types of sentences showing the writer's strong emotions.

The sample letters were also evaluated by five readers using the ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacobs, et al. (1981). The ESL Composition Profile contains five component scales, each of which receives different scores: content (30 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (25 points), and mechanics (5 points). The Profile score of each Japanese subject was the average of all the readers' scores.

Results

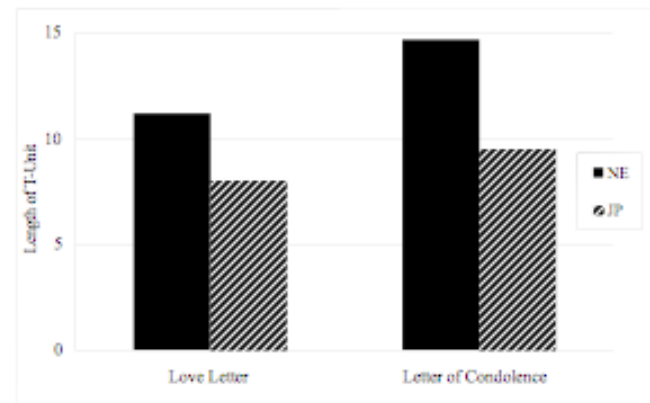Figure 1 shows the average number of words per T-Unit.

Figure 1. Words per T-Unit

The average number of words per T-Unit of the native English speakers was 11.2 in the love letter while that of the Japanese learners was 8. The average number of words per T-Unit of the native English speakers was 14.7 in the letter of condolence while that of the Japanese learners was 9.5. When we look at the number of words per T-Unit for each subject, we can observe that some of the Japanese learners produced longer sentences than some of the native English speakers, as Figures 2 and 3 show.
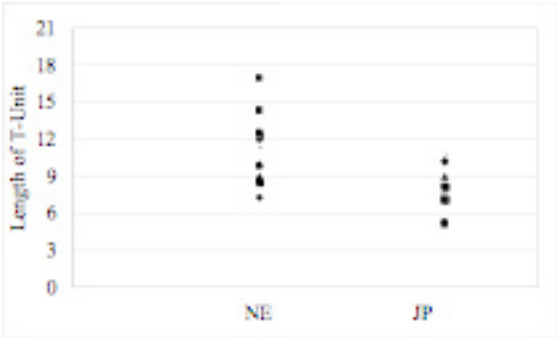
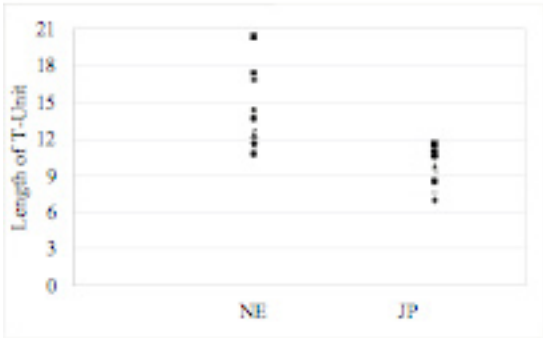**Figure 2. Words per T-Unit (love letter)**

Figure 3. Words per T-Unit (letter of condolence)

In Figure 2, 6 out of 11 Japanese learners showed greater numbers of words per T-Unit than half of the 12 native English speakers while 2 of the 11 Japanese learners showed greater numbers than 2 of the 12 native English speakers in Figure 3.

Tuning to the relationship between the proficiency level of emotional expressions and the English proficiency, Table 1 shows the correlation coefficients between the TOEIC scores of the Japanese learners and the two factors of their ESL Composition Profile scores (explained in *Procedures*) and words per T-Unit.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between the TOEIC scores and the two factors of ESL Composition Profile score and words per T-Unit

	ESL Composition Profile Score	
	Love Letter	**Letter of Condolence**
TOEIC Total Score	0.50	0.72
TOEIC Reading Score	0.58	0.66
Words per T-Unit	0.52	0.53

As Table 1 shows, the TOEIC scores of the Japanese learners and their ESL Composition Profile scores were highly correlated. In other words, a Japanese learner whose English proficiency measured by TOEIC is of excellent level has an excellent level of writing proficiency measured by their ESL Composition Profile. High correlations were also observed between words per T-Unit of the Japanese and their ESL Composition Profile scores. This indicates that a Japanese learner who can write linguistically complex sentences in English has an excellent level of proficiency in writing.

Table 2 shows correlation coefficients between the TOEIC scores and words per T-Unit.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between the TOEIC scores and words per T-Unit

	Words per T-Unit	
	Love Letter	**Letter of Condolence**
TOEIC Total Score	0.11	0.32
TOEIC Reading Score	0.24	0.42

In Table 2, the correlation coefficients between the TOEIC scores and words per T-Unit in love letter are lower than those in letter of condolence. Further research needs to be done in order to judge whether the difference found in this experiment is significant or not.

Turning to the patterns of the letters, we observed some differences in the patterns of the letters between the native speakers of English and the Japanese learners. Table 3 shows the patterns of love letters produced by the two subject groups. We observed that the native English speakers started the love letter with such sentences as "Happy (3rd) anniversary!," "No words can express …," "Words cannot describe …," and "I can't believe it has been 3 years since we first met." On the other hand, most of the Japanese learners started the letter with questions, such as "Do you know what today is?," "Guess what day it is ?," "How are you?," "What are you doing now?"

Table 3. Patterns: love letter

	Native Speakers of English	Japanese Learners of English
Beginning	- Happy (3rd) anniversary! - No words can express … - Words cannot describe … - I can't believe it has been 3 years since we first met.	- Do you know what today is?/ Guess what day it is ? - How are you? - What are you doing now? - Happy 3rd anniversary!
Body	- I'm so lucky to have you. - Memories (How they met)	- Thank you / I'm grateful to you. - I respect you. - Please marry me. - Memories (How they met)
Ending	- I look forward to spending the rest of our lives together. - I can't wait to see you. - I love you (so much). - Please write to me.	- I love you (a lot). - We are the best. - You are special for me. - I'm very happy to be with you. - Thank you for reading.

An interesting feature of the body of the love letters is that only native English speakers used the word "lucky." Here, 4 out of 12 native English speakers used the word while none of the Japanese learners used it. This indicates that the native English writer thinks the encounter was determined by luck or fate. Instead of coincidence of encounter, the Japanese learners expressed gratitude for being with the writer; 7 out of 11 Japanese learners used phrases such as "Thank you," or "I'm grateful to you." Also, two of them showed a sense of respect for the writer's boyfriend or girlfriend. Two of them even proposed marriage. We could also observe a similar feature regarding this type of letter. Concretely, such memories as how

they met or what they did together were observed in the letters written by both the native speakers of English and the Japanese learners. Four of each subject group wrote those memories.

Some differences were observed between the two groups of subjects regarding the endings; 5 out of 12 native English speakers, using the phrases like "look forward to," "can't wait to see you," and "please write to me," showed that they were looking to the future. On the other hand, 5 out of 11 Japanese learners expressed how they were feeling at present, by using phrases such as "we are the best," "you are special," and "I'm very happy."

Regarding the use of exclamatory sentences, comparative sentences, and superlative sentences, we observed that only one of the Japanese learners used a comparative sentence while 9 out of 12 native English speakers used the three types of sentences.

Table 4 shows the patterns of letters of condolence produced by the two subject groups. As with the love letters, we observed interesting differences between the native speakers of English and the Japanese learners regarding the patterns used.

What is to be noted here is that all of the native English speakers used formulaic expressions, such as "I'd like to express my (sincere) condolences," "I'd like to convey/extend my sympathies," and "Please accept that my thoughts are with you." A few of the Japanese used similar expressions ("please accept my sympathy," "all of my sympathies are with you," etc.), but none of them used the word "condolence" at any point in the letter.

In the letters produced by the Japanese learners, two patterns were observed, as shown in Table 4. In both patterns, the writer started the letter with "I'm sorry."

Table 4. Patterns: letter of condolence

	Native Speakers of English	Japanese Learners of English	
		Pattern A	Pattern B
Beginning	- I'd like to express my (sincere) condolences.	- I'm sorry to hear the news.	- I'm sorry that I can't attend the funeral.
Body 1	- Memories (What the teacher did for the writer, What a wonderful person the teacher was, etc.)	- Memories (What the teacher did for the writer, What a wonderful person the teacher was, etc.)	
Body 2	- Apologies for not being able to attend the funeral	- Apologies for not being able to attend the funeral	- I decide to get over the difficulties. - We have to accept the fact.
Ending	- I'd like to convey/extend my sympathies. - Please accept that my thoughts are with you.	- Thank you my teacher. - Please accept my sympathy. - All of my sympathies are with you.	

However, he or she expressed being sorry about the news of the teacher's death in one pattern (Pattern A) while he or she apologized for not being able to attend the funeral in the other pattern (Pattern B). In Pattern A, apologies for not being able to attend the funeral were observed in the body. In Pattern B, we observed the determination to get through a difficult time instead of the expression of apologies. In the ending of both patterns, an expression of gratitude to the teacher was made.

Regarding the use of the three types of sentences, we observed that two of the Japanese learners used exclamatory sentences and superlative sentences while four of the native English speakers used them. No one used comparative sentences in letters of condolence.

Discussion and Conclusion

We analyzed the patterns used in two kinds of personal letters written by the native speakers of English and the Japanese learners. Although further research is necessary in order to accumulate more data, we observed similarities and differences in the letters between the two subject groups. The Japanese learners need to acquire the patterns observed in the letters produced by the native English speakers in order to be efficient writers. Regarding the use of emotional expressions, the native English speakers showed the tendency to use the sentences to show strong emotions while the Japanese learners hardly used them.

We also investigated the correlation between the proficiency level of emotional expressions and the English proficiency. Regarding words per T-Unit, we observed that the native speakers of English showed more complexity in terms of T-Units than the Japanese learners of English. In addition, the native English speakers showed a higher level of complexity in letters of condolence than in love letters. The difference in words per T-Unit between the two types of letters might be interpreted as being related to the fact that a letter of condolence is more formal and requires more formulaic expressions than a love letter.

The results also showed high correlations between the TOEIC scores and the ESL Composition Profile scores, while low correlations were observed between the TOEIC scores and words per T-Unit. Although TOEIC is not supposed to measure the proficiency of essay writing, high scorers of TOEIC showed a high level of composition proficiency, as measured by the ESL Composition Profile. The ability to produce linguistically complex sentences is not necessarily related to English proficiency as measured by TOEIC.

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