

# Contrastive Rhetoric in Letter Writing: The Interaction of Linguistic Proficiency and Cultural Awareness

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This study examines the relationship between Japanese college students' proficiency in English and their cultural awareness toward a target-language culture (North American). Japanese EFL students were divided into four groups according to high and low English proficiency and high and low cultural awareness based on performance on the CELT and the researchers' cultural awareness (CA) test. The four groups wrote college and scholarship application letters. The letters were analyzed in terms of frequency and content of different Semantic Formulas. The results show that subjects with both high English proficiency and high cultural awareness manifested the rhetorical patterns closest to those in the native speakers' English letters of application. Subjects with low English proficiency and low cultural awareness showed the rhetorical patterns closest to those in the Japanese letters of application. Subjects who lacked either the sufficient level of English proficiency or cultural awareness produced writing which varied from the target style. Results indicate that cultural awareness may be as important an element as English ability in student writing.

本研究は日本の大学生の英語能力と目標言語（アメリカ英語）の文化に対する気づきの間の関係を考察するものである。日本の大学生4グループが大学入学申込および奨学金申請の手紙を書いた。被験者は、CELTによって測定された英語能力と筆者の作成した文化的気づきを測定するテストの結果に従ってグループ分けされた。手紙は意味公式の頻度と内容という観点から分析された。その結果、英語能力が高く文化的気づきも高い被験者は母語話者の書く同様の手紙に最も近い修辞パターンをしめした。英語能力も文化的気づきも低い被験者は、日本語で同様の目的の手紙を書く場合に最も近い修辞パターンを示した。英語能力または文化的気づきのどちらかが欠ける被験者は、目標のスタイルとは異なる手紙を書いた。これらの結果は、文化的気づきが学生の英作文能力の重要な要因であるかもしれないことを示している。

Robert Kaplan first proposed the notion of contrastive rhetoric in 1966. Since then many researchers of writing across the world have engaged in active research in this field. Enough evidence has been reported to support Kaplan's claim that each language has a culturally-preferred way of organizing ideas in discourse (e.g., a linear development in English vs. an indirect approach in a gyre style in Oriental languages), and that writers from different linguistic-cultural backgrounds transfer their preferred discourse patterns when they write in other languages. Among those researchers who have dealt with the differences of Japanese and English are Hinds (1979, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1987), Connor and McCagg (1983, 1987), Kobayashi (1984), Oi (1986), Mok (1993), Fisher-Stoga (1993, 1995), and Kimball (1996). All of them, however, have dealt with expository or argumentative writings in academic settings. Research oriented toward more pragmatic, non-academic perspectives has been scarce; only Jenkins and Hinds (1987) discusses the rhetorical differences in a more pragmatic context, namely business letter writing. The present study involves the comparison of rhetoric in letter writing in English and Japanese. This study is enforced by the following observations: 1) letter writing (such as social letters and business letters) is important to Japanese EFL students since it is the type of English writing that the students will face most frequently; 2) among several kinds of letter writing, however, the one they face immediately would be a letter of application because of an increasing number of Japanese students wish to study in American colleges, and 3) letter writing carries a pragmatic function to convey an intended meaning to a specific target audience in a particular culture.

The scheme of the present study is derived from the findings of two previous studies. The first study (Oi & Sato, 1990) investigated whether rhetorical transfer would be observed in Japanese EFL students' letter writing, comparing their letters with those of native speakers of English. The comparison was threefold. The first group was composed of Japanese students writing in Japanese, to determine the nature of Japanese rhetoric; the second group was composed of Japanese students writing in English; and the third group was native speakers of English writing in English. They all wrote under the same directions with the same assignment, though the directions were given in different languages depending on the groups: i.e., the first group in Japanese and the second and third groups in English. In this research, not only did we find rhetorical differences in letter writing between Japanese and American writers, we also found noticeable evidence of rhetorical transfer by Japanese students. However, this research did not take into consideration the En-

lish proficiency levels of Japanese students, so whether or not the difference was merely due to developmental factors was unknown.

The second study (Sato & Oi, 1990) was conducted under a similar format. However, this time the Japanese students were divided into two groups, high and low, according to level of English proficiency. The study showed rhetorical transfer was observed across the proficiency levels, indicating that the presence or absence of students' rhetorical transfer is not determined by English proficiency level alone. That is, there must be other factors.

### The Study

From our previous studies we found that English proficiency alone is not a decisive factor in affecting Japanese EFL students' writing behavior in letter writing. Therefore, in the present research, we introduced a new factor, cultural awareness, which is in the domain of pragmatic competence. We define cultural awareness as one's familiarity with the perceptive and behavioral patterns in a target culture, American culture in this study. Combining these two factors, we propose the following research questions:

- 1) Does the degree of cultural awareness affect the Japanese EFL students' writing behavior in letter writing?
- 2) If the degree of cultural awareness is related to the students' writing behavior, what are the roles of cultural awareness and English proficiency respectively in the students' letter writing?

### Method

*Subjects:* Subjects ( $N=42$ ) were selected from students enrolled in three college EFL writing classes. The Ss were sophomore English majors at a Japanese college. They had practiced some narrative and expository writings, but they had experienced no formal training in letter writing. The Ss included in the study were selected, following the procedure outlined below.

### Procedure

*Task:* All students in the three classes were asked to write a letter of application to a college in English. They were told to read a notice which announced the offering of a scholarship at a college in America and to write a letter applying for the college and the scholarship.

*Instruments:* Based on the results of the two former studies, we introduced two new factors for consideration. One is the variation in English proficiency levels of Japanese EFL students, and the other is the degree of their cultural awareness of American culture.

In order to measure the English proficiency levels, we administered the CELT (Comprehensive English Language Test) (Harris & Palmer, 1986). To test the degree of cultural awareness, we devised our own cultural awareness (CA) test. For the cultural awareness test, we selected 20 questions regarding critical situations that reflect crucial differences between Japanese culture and American culture (see Appendix). These questions covered the social, school, and workplace environments. The questions were devised by us, but the ideas were extracted from various books about cross-cultural communication that emphasize the differences between Japanese culture and American culture (e.g., Condon & Yousef, 1975; Sakamoto & Naotsuka, 1982; Barnlund, 1975, 1989; Furuta, 1987, 1990; Nishida, H., 1989; Nishida, T., Nishida, H., Tsuda, & Mizuta, 1989; Sherard, 1989; Matsumoto, 1994). The CELT and CA were administered to all students in the three classes. Based on the scores, we divided the students into the following four groups, W, X, Y and Z (Table 1). The W Group included students who scored high in both the CELT and CA test; the X Group scored high in the CELT but low in the CA test; the Y Group scored low in the CELT but high in the CA test; the Z Group scored low on the both tests. The demarcation line for "high" was placed at the upper 30 percent line among all the students and "low" at the lower 30 percent line for both tests. That was 165 points for high and 140 points for low on the CELT, and 15 points for high and 11 points for low on the 20-point CA test. Students who fell into these categories were selected as the subjects ( $N=42$ ). Other students were excluded from the study.

Table 1: Classification of Subjects

CELT	CA	
	High $\geq 15$	Low $< 11$
High $\geq 165$	W ( $n = 9$ )	X ( $n = 9$ )
Low $< 140$	Y ( $n = 8$ )	Z ( $n = 16$ )

W: CELT-High, CA-High; X: CELT-High, CA-Low; Y: CELT-Low, CA-High; Z: CELT-Low, CA-Low

### Analysis

Each of the letters written by the Ss was segmented according to idea units called Semantic Formulas (SFs), as done in our previous two studies. This analytical measure was based on a study by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), which dealt with the analysis of refusals in speech. The SFs employed in the present study and a sample of each SF are:

1. Identification (ID): *I am a student at — college.*
2. Social talk (ST): *How are you?*
3. Referring to the ad. (RE): *I saw your ad about the scholarship.*
4. Writing a letter (WR): *So I am writing an application letter.*
5. Application message (AP): *I decided to apply.*
6. Reason (REA): *I'm interested in American culture and to study in America.*
7. Qualification (QUA): *I have a 3.8 grade point average (on a 4.0 scale) at —, and a score in the upper 20% bracket on the SAT test.*
8. Disqualification (DIS): *I'm afraid of going to the U.S. by myself.*
9. Petition (PE): *Could you please help me?*
10. Personal appeal (PA): *With these experiences, I feel I could make a positive contribution to ABC College and hope you will consider my application.*
11. Reference (REF): *I am enclosing a reference from Mr. Kempski, Head of the History department.*
12. Promise (PR): *I'll study hard.*
13. Apology (AP): *I'm sorry I have a favor.*
14. Request for information (REQ): *Please send me any forms that need completing.*
15. Closing remark (CR): *I would appreciate for your kindness.*
16. Expecting a reply (EX): *I'm looking forward to your letter.*

We first analyzed each letter into a sequence of the different SFs (see "Analysis of Sample Writing" below for sample analyses). We further analyzed those SFs in two aspects: 1) frequency (how often they appeared) and 2) content (concrete examples of SFs). The results were compared with those obtained in the two earlier studies in respect to the nature of mother-tongue writing of Japanese colleges students writing in Japanese and the target-language writing of native speakers writing in English.

## Results and Discussion

### Frequency

Each application letter was segmented according to the 16 different SFs, and how often each SF appeared was examined across the four different groups. Table 2 shows the frequencies of the 16 SFs identified in the four groups as well as those identified in the American subjects writing in English and the Japanese subjects writing in Japanese in the Oi & Sato study (1990).

In previous studies (Oi & Sato, 1990; Sato & Oi, 1990), the following differences were found between the Japanese and American subjects' application letters:

Table 2: Frequency of the Semantic Formulas Used by Different Groups

SF	Group					
	American (n=13)	W (n=9)	X (n=9)	Y (n=8)	Z (n=16)	Japanese (n=30)
ID	11 (84.6%)	8 (88.9%)	6 (66.7%)	5 (62.5%)	10 (62.5%)	16 (53.3%)
ST	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (12.5%)	9 (56.3%)	8 (26.7%)
AD	6 (46.2%)	5 (55.6%)	4 (44.4%)	4 (50%)	8 (50%)	25 (83.3%)
WR	6 (46.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (20%)
AM	10 (76.9%)	9 (100%)	6 (66.7%)	6 (75%)	11 (68.8%)	18 (60%)
REA	6 (46.2%)	9 (100%)	7 (77.8%)	7 (87.5%)	13 (81.3%)	30 (100%)
QUA	8 (61.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)
DIS	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	5 (16.7%)
PE	1 (7.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (33.3%)	2 (25%)	8 (50%)	13 (43.3%)
PA	5 (38.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
REF	3 (23.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
PR	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	3 (37.5%)	6 (37.5%)	13 (43.3%)
AP	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
IM	7 (53.8%)	5 (55.6%)	2 (22.2%)	2 (25%)	5 (31.3%)	7 (23.3%)
CR	7 (53.8%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	14 (46.7%)
EX	2 (15.4%)	3 (33.3%)	2 (22.2%)	2 (25%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (6.7%)

ID=Identification; ST=Social talk; RE=Referring to the ad; WR=Writing a letter; AP=Application message; REA=Reason; QUA=Qualifier; DIS=Disqualification; PE=Petition; PA=Personal appeal; REF=Reference; PR=Promise; AP=Apology; REQ=Request; CR=Closing remark; EX= Expecting a reply

- 1) Many American subjects used *persuasive* strategies, showing their abilities and previous experiences with concrete data. They often referred to their academic records and underscored their qualifications.
- 2) The Japanese subjects, regardless of the language used (English or Japanese) or of their English proficiency levels, tended to use *emotional* strategies meant to attract the reader's sympathy.

The Japanese subjects realized these *emotional* strategies by using such SFs as "social talk," "disqualification," "petition," and "promise." Those four SFs were rarely found in the letters by the American subjects. Our previous studies suggested that these four formulas were evidence of the Japanese subjects' negative transfer from Japanese writing and that these formulas were culturally inappropriate in English letter writing when addressed to American readers.

The SF "social talk" is a clear transfer of the Japanese usual letter format in which one is supposed to open a letter message with either greetings such as *I trust this finds you in good health*, or references to the weather such as *It has been awfully hot this summer. How are you coping with the heat?* It is considered impolite just to start business abruptly in any Japanese letter, even in a business letter. The Japanese students are so much used to this writing convention that they tend to persistently transfer this SF negatively in English application letters.

The SF "petition" is a desperate-sounding plea such as *Please give me a chance*. This type of pathetic tone is unfitting in an English letter of application.

The SF "disqualification" is a statement like *My English is not good*. Judging from the American practice of a letter of application to a college, this statement is like a taboo, admitting a reason for disqualification as an applicant. We interpret this as a reflection of the Japanese tendency to value modesty or understatement of oneself as often described in many studies (among them, Condon & Yousef, 1975). Concerning the Japanese tendency to resort to "petition" and "disqualification" when writing a letter of application, an exemplary anecdote is introduced in Sakamoto and Naotsuka (1982, pp. 34-37).

A typical example of the SF "promise" is a statement such as *I'll study hard if I'm admitted to your school*. A number of Japanese students finish their letters with "promise" following "petition." We regard it as a reflection of the Japanese formulaic expression *gambarimasu*, which can be translated as *I'll do my best*.

The present study, therefore, focuses on those four SFs (social talk, disqualification, petition, and promise) particularly identified as typical in Japanese Ss' letters of application.

Table 3 shows the frequencies (in percentage) of the four SFs used by the different groups (W, X, Y, Z) as well as those used by the American subjects writing in English and the Japanese subjects writing in Japanese (Oi & Sato, 1990).

Table 3: Frequencies of the Four Sematic Formulas (%)

SF (Sematic Formulas)	Group					
	American	W	X	Y	Z	Japanese
ST (Social talk)	0	0	22.2	12.5	56.3	26.7
DIS (Disqualification)	0	0	22.2	12.5	18.8	16.7
PE (Petition)	7.7	0	33.3	25	50	43.3
PR (Promise)	0	11.1	22.2	37.5	37.5	43.3

Each of the four groups demonstrated unique writing patterns. The writing patterns of the W Group, high English proficiency and high cultural awareness, were most similar to the patterns found for American subjects in the previous studies. No subjects in the W Group employed "social talk," "disqualification," or "petition," and only one subject included a "promise" (11.1%).

In contrast, the Z Group, low English and low cultural awareness, varied most from the native English speakers' pattern and showed the clearest transfer from Japanese. The Z Group ranked highest in the frequencies of three SFs: "social talk" (56.3%), "disqualification" (18.8%), and "petition" (50%), and second highest in the frequency of "promise" (37.5%).

The X Group, high English proficiency and low cultural awareness, and the Y Group, low English proficiency and high cultural awareness, were between the W and Z Groups. Though the differences between the X and Y Groups were not large, the percentages of the three out of four Japanese-oriented SFs were higher in the X Group (22.2% for "social talk," 22.2% for "disqualification," and 33.3 % for "petition") than in the Y Group (12.5% for "social talk," 12.5% for "disqualification," and 25% for "petition"). This suggests that both the writing patterns of X and Y Groups differed less from the target pattern than the Z Group, but the two groups did not as closely approximate the target style as the W Group. Additionally, the X Group demonstrated a greater variation from the target pattern than the Y Group.



### *Content*

The next step of analysis was to examine what the subjects actually wrote for each of the four SFs in the letters of application. For each SF, several subcategories were established to examine the actual content of the four SFs in detail. For example, the SF "social talk" was further classified into such subcategories as *Hello*, *How do you?* and *How are you?* Table 4 illustrates the results of the content analysis.

The content written by the Z Group varied most from the pattern for the English letter of application and reflected most clearly the practice of the Japanese letter of application. The typical pattern of a letter of application by the Z Group started with a colloquial social talk *Hello* (31.3%), said, *I don't have enough English ability* (12.5%), yet pleaded for the scholarship by saying, *Please give me the scholarship* (25%), and ended with a promise by saying, *I will study hard* (31.3%). Thus, the letters by the Z Group had emotional and pathetic tones. In contrast, there was only one example of "promise" for the W Group: *I will make efforts* (11.1%). Emotional and pathetic tones were not perceived in the letters by the W Group.

The X and Y Groups manifested only one or two examples of some subcategories of the four SFs. The general tendency, however, was for both the X and Y Groups to be positioned between the W and Z Groups, as was found in the results in the frequency count of the SFs. The letters by the X and Y Groups did not sound as pathetic and emotional as those by the Z Group, but they were not as completely free of these tones as those by the W Group. Furthermore, such emotional and pathetic tones were somewhat stronger in the letters of the X Group than those of the Y Group.

### *Analysis of Sample Writing*

Representative samples of the letters done by Ss from each of the four groups, W, X, Y, and Z, help explain the characteristic writing patterns. Each sample letter is analyzed by SFs, with errors left intact.

Sample 1, written by S-1 in the W Group (high English proficiency and high cultural awareness), is quite close to the target letters of application by the native speakers of English. The letter concisely conveys the intended message by including such SFs as "identification," "reason," "application message," "request for information," and "closing remark." None of the four SFs which characterize Japanese letters of application (social talk, disqualification, petition, and promise) are included.

Table 4: Content of the Four Semantic Formulas

SF Subcategory	Group					
	American( <i>n</i> =13)	W ( <i>n</i> =9)	X ( <i>n</i> =9)	Y ( <i>n</i> =8)	Z ( <i>n</i> =16)	Japanese( <i>n</i> =30)
<b>Social Talk</b>						
Hello	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	5 (31.3%)	2 (6.7%)
How do you do?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (20%)
How are you?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	0 (0%)
<b>Disqualification</b>						
Don't know reality	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)
Don't have enough						
English ability	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (22.2%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (13.3%)
Afraid of going to America	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)
Cannot express opinions	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
<b>Petition</b>						
Help me	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (6.7%)
Admit me	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (6.7%)
Understand me	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (23.3%)
Give me the scholarship	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	1 (3.3%)
Give me a good answer	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)
Give me a chance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
<b>Promise</b>						
Study hard	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (25%)	5 (31.3%)	5 (16.7%)
Make efforts	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)
Lead a full life	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (6.7%)
Make good use of the scholarship	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)
Get something in America	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Do my best	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mature	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)

## Sample 1:

S-1, W Group, High English Proficiency and High Cultural Awareness

Dear Mr. Thompson:

## \*IDENTIFICATION

[I am a student in \_\_\_\_\_ University in Japan and I'm very interested in your exchange program between ABC College and our university.]

## \*REASON

[I'm studying English and American literature here and I believe studying in your college will much help my research in as well as improving my English skills.]

## \*APPLICATION MESSAGE

[Therefore I do want to apply for this program. And I would like to apply for the scholarship you offer simultaneously.]

## \*REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

[Please send me a brochure and/or more details about them.]

## \*CLOSING REMARK

[Your most up-to-date information will be tremendously appreciated.]

Sincerely yours,

Sample 2 was written by S-2 in the X Group (high English proficiency and low cultural awareness). Since the level of S-2's English proficiency is high, there are no major grammatical mistakes. It does not include such Japanese-oriented SFs as "petition" and "promise." However, S-2 employs "disqualification" and underestimates self-worth, in contrast with the practice in the English letter of application where the use of "persuasive" strategies is expected. For instance, S-2 writes, *I can neither understand what English speakers say nor express my thought in English well, and I'm not good at express my opinion to other people.* Thus, even though S-2 exhibits no substantial grammatical mistake in the domain in linguistic competence, problems in cultural awareness in the realm of pragmatic competence are exhibited.

## Sample 2:

S-2, X Group, High English Proficiency and Low Cultural Awareness

## \*REASON

[I have studied English since I was a junior high school student. English is not so easy to learn, but I'm interested in it very much, because the pronunciation of English words is very different from one of Japanese words, and I like pronouncing them very much.]

## \*DISQUALIFICATION

[To my regret, Japanese education in English is not so good for learning English conversation. I don't think I have much trouble reading English, but I can neither understand what English speakers say nor express my thought in English well.]

## \*REASON

[Living in the United States is the best way to improve such troubles of mine. That is the first reason I want to study at your college. The second one is that I want to take part in an active lessons.]

## \*DISQUALIFICATION

[I'm not good at express my opinion to other people.]

## \*REASON

[It' OK in Japan, but it cannot be allowed in other countries, so I want to train myself in active discussions in lessons at a college in the United States.

I have been to the United States to learn English before. My parents paid for me in that case. I thank them very much, but I can't have them pay any more.]

## \*APPLICATION MESSAGE

[So I'd like to be offered scholarship.]

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Sample 3, from S-3, is representative of the Y Group (low English proficiency and high cultural awareness). S-3 does not include any of the four Japanese-oriented SFs. However, S-3's lack of organization makes the style far different from that found in the target letters of application. Reasons for application are mentioned sporadically and the self-introduction is begun, in an inappropriate place, too abruptly.

Like Sample 2, Sample 3 is not an appropriate English letter of application, but for different reasons. Although Sample 3 has no critical problem in content from a pragmatic aspect, it has many problems in grammar and organization.

## Sample 3:

Y Group, S-3, Low English Proficiency and High Cultural Awareness

Dear Mr. Thompson,

## \* APPLICATION MESSAGE

[I want to get the scholarship.]

## \*REASON

[Because My father has been sick since last year. And My family is very poor. I can't afford money to go the college.]

## \*APPLICATION MESSAGE

[But I want to study English and literature in ABC college. I want to go to America.]

## \*REASON

[I'm interested in American costumes, culture, family life and eating life. And I want to understand American people and watch beauties of nature, town.]

## \*IDENTIFICATION

[Introduction my self and my family.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm nineteen years old. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ University college student. My hobbies are playing tennis, watching movies, cooking, and shopping. I have four members. My father, My mother, my brother, me.

My father is 57 and businessman. But he is sick now. My mother is 48 and House wife. My brother is 23 and he graduated University this spring but he doesn't catch a job and in house he is studying law everyday for exercise.]

## \*REASON

[I want to learn literature and American life. So I want to speak English.]

Sample 4, by S-4, represents the Z Group (low English proficiency and low cultural awareness). Sample 4 is linguistically unacceptable, with many errors in sentence construction and no organization as a paragraph. S-4 includes three of the four Japanese-oriented SFs: "social talk," "promise," and "petition." The letter begins with *bello*, makes several promises, saying, *If I go to ABC College, I study harder than now*, and *I will grow than now and I will come back to Japan!* In addition, S-4 petitions Mr. Thompson, saying, *Mr. Thompson, I want to know American people and culture. Please get the chance to me.* Thus, it is inappropriate as an English letter of application, both linguistically and culturally.

## Sample 4:

## S-4, Z Group, Low English Proficiency and Low Cultural Awareness

Dear Mr. Thompson:

**\*SOCIAL TALK \*IDENTIFICATION**

[Hello,] [My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am twenty years old now. I am interested in American people and culture. But I've never seen foreign countries. I want to go to American very much. Of course, I am studying hard very day.]

**\*APPLICATION MESSAGE \*REASON**

[I want to get the scholarship.][Because to help my home's life. My brother is high school student and my home is very new. Going to America need much money.]

**\*PROMISE**

[If I go to ABC College, I study harder than now.]

**\*REASON**

[And I want to make many foreign friends there. I think American is very friendly and kindly. Sure, I will get nice relationship with them.]

**\*PETITION**

[Mr. Thompson, I want to know American people and culture. Please get the chance to me.]

**\*PROMISE**

[After year I will grow than now and I will come back to Japan!]

### Conclusion

In this study, we have examined the rhetorical differences between Japanese and English letter writing. The Japanese EFL students in this study seem to transfer Japanese rhetorical patterns into English when they write in English. Of immediate concern to the present study was examination of two factors, English proficiency and cultural awareness, which may determine the degree of rhetorical transfer.

The first research question sought to determine whether the degree of cultural awareness affects Japanese EFL students' letter writing behavior. The results of the present study answer this question affirmatively: both the level of English proficiency and the degree of cultural awareness of the target culture affect Japanese EFL students' letter writing behavior. The second research question concerned the respective roles of cultural awareness and English proficiency in the Japanese EFL students' writing performance. The results show the following tendencies:

1. Students with high English proficiency and high cultural awareness produce letters closest in style to that of native speakers of English;
2. Students with low English proficiency and low cultural awareness produce letters closest in style to that of native speakers of Japanese;
3. Students with high English proficiency and low cultural awareness produce letters with culturally inappropriate content but acceptable English;
4. Students with low English proficiency and high cultural awareness produce letters with generally culturally appropriate content but problematic English.

In order for our EFL students to compose in a way which is acceptable to an English-speaking audience, we need to develop not only their English proficiency but also their cultural awareness. This is especially so in letter writing, which carries a more pragmatic function than writing such as exposition and argumentation. As Mok (1993) asserts:

Awareness of the [cross-cultural] differences is important because it makes students realize that to become part of the target language discourse community, they need to develop new attitudes, to meet certain criteria of the target language's traditions, and, in some cases, to put aside their native language habits. (p. 157)

We need, therefore, to develop teaching methods and teaching materials which integrate cultural factors with linguistic ones. Questions such as those used in our cultural awareness test could be modified and turned into instructional tasks. Alternatively, students could conduct their own SF analyses: first writing application letters, then analyzing the SFs in the draft to see whether L1-based SFs were included, and finally revising the letters into acceptable English letters of application.

More research will be needed to determine whether cultural awareness is a critical factor when the Japanese EFL students engage in other types of letter writing. In addition, research will be needed to examine whether the types of cultural and rhetorical instruction suggested above have positive effects on EFL students' writing performance.

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**Appendix: Sample Questions from Cultural Awareness Test**

Under the following circumstances, which behavior do you think you are likely to follow? Choose one from the two alternatives.

**[Social life]**

1. Six months have passed since you came to the U.S. with your parents. Today you have invited Mr. and Mrs. Brown to your home. They have been very kind to you since you came to the U.S. and this is their first visit. While chatting over tea, Mrs. Brown says to you, "Could I see the rest of your house?" To your regret, the house is far from being clean enough to show to other people. How would you react to Mrs. Brown's request?

- 1) You would refuse, saying, "It's such a mess. I really cannot show you this time."
- 2) You would show her around, saying, "It's a mess, but if you don't mind that."

2. You are asked to have tea by an American woman, Mrs. Anderson. It is hot, and you are thirsty. When Mrs. Anderson says, "What would you like? Would you like something hot or cold?" what would you say to her?

- 1) You don't want to bother Mrs. Anderson, so you would say, "Anything will be fine with me."
- 2) You would say clearly what you would like to have.

**[School life]**

3. You are now studying at D University in the U.S. and taking Sociology I among other courses. Professor Samson, who is teaching Sociology I, takes a discussion style in his class. Since your English is still not good enough, you cannot quite participate in the discussion with American students, although you are trying to. There is another Japanese student, Mariko, in this class. She is always quiet and does not contribute to the discussion. You came here two years earlier than Mariko. How would you advise her?

- 1) You would suggest that she tell Professor Samson of her linguistic disadvantage and ask him to acknowledge her willingness to participate.
- 2) You would advise her to participate in the discussion as actively and assertively as she can, seeking the professor's help after class as needed.

4. It has been a month since you began studying at B University in the U.S. The other day you were asked to give a speech for an audience comprised of professors. Although you are not confident of your English as it has been just a month, you've decided to give the speech. How would you deliver the speech?

- 1) You would try to be confident of your English and not mention anything concerning the ability of your English.
- 2) You would, first of all, tell the audience that your English is not good because you are afraid that the audience will be surprised at your poor English.

[Workplace]

5. You are employed by an American company. Yesterday you saw Jane, who is a co-worker, step into the elevator before Mr. Black, who is her boss. You are older than Jane. How would you feel about her behavior?

- 1) You would assume it natural since she is a woman.
- 2) You would try to reprimand her as you think she was being rude.

6. After graduation from college, you climbed up the ladder of success and are now a branch-office manager. As business is good this year, you are quite busy. Today you have work that needs to be done by tomorrow. Unfortunately tomorrow is Sunday. If you fail with this, it means a loss to the company, so you want your employees to come to work tomorrow. What would you do?

- 1) You would ask your employees to come to work even on Sunday, explaining to them it is for the sake of the company.
- 2) You would ask for volunteers to help with the project, stressing extra benefits for those who choose to do so.