

日本人大学生による苦情の書き方に見るライティング方策

University Students' Strategies in Formal Letter Writing in an EFL Context

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Keywords

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EFL writing, complaint letter writing by Japanese university students, register and writing strategies, English in socio-cultural contexts

ABSTRACT

日本人大学生が課題として英語で書いた苦情を訴える手紙を分析し、どのような方策が用いられるかを考察する。さまざまなレベルにおいて母語が影響し、時にはそれが英語としては議論にならなかったり読み手を混乱させることになる。大学レベルでのEFL学習者は社会に出ればいずれ正式な文書の読み書きを経験することになるのであるから、そのような形式や書き方に触れておくことは有益である。小論では、学生のサンプルをフォーマット、全体構成、社会言語学的要素の3つの観点から分析した。また、授業でフィードバックを行ってコンテキストや目的に見合った手紙を書くために必要な知識について説明し、その後個別にインタビューをすることで学生たちが感じた不安や問題点を明らかにし、特定ジャンルにおける常套句や効果的な表現を学ばせるにはどのような学習が必要で、どのような教え方が効果的かを考察した。

This paper examines Japanese university students' writing of a formal claim letter and observes what linguistic strategies are employed. It also considers issues related to the transfer from the mother tongue that may obscure the main point and thus confuse the reader. Since all EFL learners at college level will eventually experience occasions in social life whereby a formal letter is indispensable, they need to be aware of successful and efficient types of writing. The paper analyzes the samples from three aspects: formatting

and layout, the overall structure of the text, and sociolinguistic features transferred from L1 to L2. Through individual follow-up interviews with the students, involving lecture feedback and the elicitation of perceived difficulties, the paper proposes how EFL learners will be able to acquire specific genre features and use them in an appropriate context for a specific purpose.

When EFL speakers have to write a letter that needs to be precise about a problem or specific issue in order to request action from the reader, they have to be fully aware of the pragmatic use of expressions and utilize strategies for persuasion (Gilquin & Paquot, 2008; Hyland, 2003; Lillis, 2001; Lillis, 2013; Llach, 2011; Mauranen, 2012; Mukherjee & Hundt, 2011). This paper examines Japanese university students' writing of a formal claim letter and observes what linguistic strategies are employed. It also considers issues related to the transfer from the mother tongue that may obscure the main point and thus confuse the reader. Since all EFL learners will eventually experience occasions in which a formal letter is needed, they need to be aware of successful and efficient types of writing. Klimczak-Pawlak explains the English language as the most common communication tool as follows:

While the code of English belongs to the native speakers of English, the actual choice of words and structures to perform specific functions is culturally specific and lies in the hands of all those who use it for communication, most of whom are the non-native speakers of English. (2014, p. x)

Letter writing is one of the most common activities both in L1 and L2 (Lillis, 2013).¹ Casual letters addressed to friends and relatives may be in the digital form, yet writing letters for invitation, birthday wish, sympathy, or gratitude is still common. Formal letters are considered important as evidence of communication or confirmation of facts in making requests, reports, and complaints to offices, institutions, and the public. Pioneer researchers on EFL letter writing include Jenkins

and Hinds (1987), who compared formal business letters in American English, French, and Japanese. Their observations indicate that “American business letters are reader oriented, French business letters are writer oriented, and Japanese business letters are oriented to the space between the writer and reader” (1987, p. 327). According to Cornbleet and Carter (2001, p. 43), the form and style of any letter are affected by CPPR (context, purpose, producer, receiver). Cornbleet and Carter use an example of a complaint letter from a consumer to a chocolate company. Two samples that the two authors present, one by a seven-year-old girl and another by an educated adult, are shown in Appendix I.

Both of the sample letters start and end with basic information such as the date and the names and addresses of the sender and the receiver as well as formulaic expressions such as *Dear XX* and *yours faithfully*. These frameworks are important because they immediately signal that the document is a formal letter. Also crucial is the message to “describe the problem and the feeling it provoked and anticipate future action on the part of the receiver” (Cornbleet and Carter, 2001, p. 43). The girl’s direct way and the lady’s polite manner are different, but are typical stylistic choices. The writing is affected by “age, gender, personality, educational background, intellect, idiolect, status, and individual creativity” (Cornbleet and Carter, 2001, p. 43), which will result in many different forms and expressions by means of different lexis, grammar, and style. Table 1 is part of Lillis’s analytic framework for analyzing a genre. Letter writing may be both formal and casual (2013, p.141):

Table 1: Lilli's analytic framework for analyzing a genre

Semiotic Orientation		
Modes	Writing	Writing
Textual Materials	Impersonal forms	Personal forms
	Density of expression/clause density	Looseness of expression/clause intricacy
	Embedded/indirect questions	Direct questions
	Disciplinary terminology	Everyday terms
	Formal expressions	Colloquial expressions
	Implicitness	Explicitness

Writing is a tool to articulate personal needs and voice social identity inscribed on various assumptions. The language used varies according to each context.

This paper examines a complaint letter written by Japanese EFL university students and considers strategies they employ.² Students in one of the English linguistics courses I offer were assigned to write a letter in the situation that Ellie and Sue had to deal with. The situation was explained in class. Sample letters by Ellie and Sue were not shown at this stage. For homework, students were instructed to write a letter for complaint and prepare it in the formal letter format, either by hand or word-processor, after confirming, in class discussion, what the forms and functions such a letter should have. A total of 127 samples has been collected over three academic years.

1. Formatting and Layout

The conventional layout is an important feature for certain types of writing such as public signs, menus, recipes, train schedules, etc. The visual format conveys the message that the writing belongs to a certain genre, which meets with the readers' expectation. The arrangement within the written text is part of the common rule to mark a certain register. The students were aware such formal features, and thus all of them used a letter format though differences were observed in where to provide information such as the addresses, the

date, and the writer's name and signature. They also knew that formulaic expressions are commonly used in a formal letter for the opening and closing greetings. Most of them started the opening greeting with a salutation that includes *Dear*. What follows *Dear* varies and can be classified into the following six groups:³

(1) With a single word:

Dear Manager; Dear Sirs

(2) With company's name or service department's name:

Dear Thornton Co; Dear Customer Service; Dear Customer Support Representative; Dear Manger of Customer Services of Thornton; Dear Thornton Customer Service

The students were well aware of gender issues, which (3) and (4) represent:

(3) *Dear Sir/Madam; Dear Sirs and Mesdames; Dear Sir and Mesdames; Dear Sirs/Mesdames*

Though the students' intention was appropriate, the imbalance of singular and plural forms, such as *Dear Sir and Mesdames*, may not occur in L1 speakers' writing. There were more examples of extreme cases of gender consciousness:

(4) *Dear Madames and Sirs; Dear Mesdames/Sirs; Dear Sir or Mesdames; Dear Mesdames et Messieurs*

Adding the plural *-s* to *Sir* was apparently harder than to write the correct plural French form of *Mesdames*.

The combination of (2) and (3) was also found:

(5) *Dear Thornton's Sirs and Mesdames; Dear Sirs*

and Mesdames of Customer Services

Some salutations did not include the word *Dear* but contained a simple address:

(6) *Thornton Customer Service; Customer Service; Hello*

A few students used no opening greeting formula.

Varieties are known regarding the punctuation after *Dear XX*, which include a comma (*Dear XX,*), colon (*Dear XX:*), semicolon (*Dear XX;*), or with no mark. Some students put a comma after *Dear*, resulting in an unusual punctuation form such as *Dear, Sir*. Instruction of appropriate punctuation is not simple as agitated by Truss (2004), but ELF writers should be informed about punctuation marks at a certain point in their learning.

Closing formulae were less varied than the opening salutation; common expressions included: *Yours Sincerely; Sincerely; Sincerely Yours, Yours Faithfully; Yours Truly; Best Regards; Good Regards; Best Wishes*

Erroneous expressions for a closing greeting included:

You're sincerely; Best Regard

Some students used no closing greeting, leaving the impression that the letter was incomplete.

2. The Overall Structure of the Text

In their letter, the students needed to, a) describe the problem, namely one biscuit was missing, b) explain the disappointment provoked by that, and c) request a response from the receiver. Most of the students followed this order in their text, which may be a sign of good transfer from their L1.

(1) Problem Description

While some students simply stated the problem, others tried to praise the product first in order to be polite and save the company's face (Hewings & Hewings, 2005; Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). Simple statements were followed by *but* or *however*. The following is a typical simple statement:

/I bought Apricot "n" Almond Choices from you on April 27. However, I was so surprised to notice your product contained 4 pieces instead of 5./

/Today I bought a box of Apricot "n" Almond Choices. Ordinarily there are 5 biscuits in a box. However, it has only 4 biscuits./

/I have bought Apricot "n" Almond Choices the other day. Unfortunately, when I opened it I saw that there are only four cookies./

Typical face-saving expressions included the following:

/I always enjoy your products and having Apricot "n" Almond Choices with my favorite tea is one of my pleasures. However, this time, I regret to have something to report you about that Apricot "n" Almond Choices which I love the most./

/I usually buy your Apricot "n" Almond Choices every Monday. I really like it, thank you for your nice production. However, I bought it as usual today and found one piece of five biscuits was missing./

/I am always satisfied with your tasty products. Whenever I visit Britain, I purchase cookies, Apricot "n" Almond Choices, for a souvenir or myself. I love the taste of cookies and the great design of its package. I am sure it must be the best cookies in Britain./

/I am a fan of Thornton and buy them many times. Especially, I love Apricot "n" Almond Choices. I almost addicted myself with eating them./

/Thank you for always being very nice to all the customers. Having a tea time with your products is the most favorite time of my busy everyday life. I visit your shop to buy souvenirs for my family, friends and myself every time I have a business trip to the UK./

Some students began the message with an apology: */I'm sorry to send such a letter to you./*

On the other hand, direct expressions were used in the following samples:

/This time the reason of my message is the

complaint for your store's goods./
/I am going to make a complaint./
/I would like to complain about the Apricot "n"
Almond Choices I bought a few days ago./

More face-saving efforts were observed in the statement that the letter was NOT a complaint letter at all or Japanese-like expressions not to embarrass the reader:

/I am writing to you, not to make a complaint, but to share my suggestion with a hope of the further improvement of your brand./

/I am awfully sorry that I have to inform you this./

/I understand that it might be none of my business to tell you, but after I came back home and as I opened, I found that there were only four biscuits in the package which is usually supposed to contain five of them. At that moment, I thought that it would be better to inform you about this in order not to let this kind of mistakes happen again./

/I am so reluctant to send such an unpleasant letter and give troubles to you but I would like to enjoy your products in the future./

/I do not think this case would affect my reliance for your company and product itself. I just want to inform the case. I will continue to be a fan of Apricot "n" Almond Choices./

(2) Description of the Disappointment

The following expressions were used in order to describe the disappointment:

/I was really disappointed when I opened the package./

/I'm writing this letter because I'd like let you know about my surprise and sadness at something about your product./

/I was so disappointed that one cookie was missing because I really love your products./

/I am little embarrassed because there were only four biscuits in the bag./

/I was very shocked when I opened the package./

/I felt miserable and decided to let you know about

this./

(3) Request of Action

A certain number of students did not state that they anticipated any future action. In that case, the letter simply describes the problem and the writer's disappointment:

/It was the first time such a disappointed thing happen./ (end of the letter text)

This does not mean, however, that the students did not hope for a response or reaction from the receiver. Stating the problem may suffice in the Japanese context in order to stimulate actions on the hearer's/reader's side. Typical polite expressions included the following:

/Could you check this matter? If it is possible, I would like to barter for the new one.

I look forward to new goods./

/Would you please send me the new one?/

/Could you send another set as an evidence of your oath?/

/I would be grateful if you could send me a complete package of cookies./

/I would like to request resending of your product with a shipping charge. I am truly grateful for your consideration./

3. Sociolinguistic Features from L1 to L2

(1) Face-saving expressions were frequently used:

/I understand that people make mistakes. Nevertheless, tiny mistakes could possibly make a fan of your brand unhappy although the costumer would have had a precious time with your products. I believe your brand will improve even more if you could consider the points that I have made here. Lastly, I would be very happy to receive a package with five chocolates from you soon. My loyalty to your brand will stay the same./

/In conclusion, I would like you to send back the new package with five biscuits to my address. I look forward to next package I buy for my

enjoyment./

/Even though there were only four biscuits, I enjoyed them very much. I am looking forward to visiting you again./

(2) There was no mention about the actual action but simply an expression of gratitude to conclude the message:

/Thank you in advance for your immediate response to the matter./

/I am waiting for your reply and looking forward to next happy biscuit Monday./

/Thank you for your understanding./

/I hope our Thornton company will process it appropriately./

(3) Several students expressed a direct request with emphasis on the number:

/Therefore, I ask that you would replace this product into another FIVE-packed one. I await your prompt reply./

(4) For certain students, a comparison with other companies felt a good strategy:

/The American cookie company bland, country marm had a great reputation for such trouble because they sent good compensating present for their trouble./

(5) A logical argument was used in the following statement though problems in grammar might hinder the legitimacy of this argument:

/Fortunately I purchased this for personal use. If I gave it as a souvenir to a family with five members, I might be quite impolite person. It makes me shudder to think of this supposed case./

(6) Some students used expressions that might be too direct:

/Did you intentionally reduce the number of biscuits for the cost managing? Or just a mistake?/

/You'd better recognize as an indication of big incident that injure trusts./

/I do not want any compensation, however, if I were a kind of claimer and I did not like your store, I would have filed a suit against your company and announced this to media.

You took my life's enjoyment. How are you going to pay this? I'll forgive you if you bring hundred bags of "Thornton" within ten days . . . or else. I'll bring you to the court.

Therefore, I would like to request a full refund of the product including round-trip transportation and to return a new bag of Apricot "n" Almond Choices./

The above statement may come from the writer's sense of humor. Some students showed a deliberate use of humorous characters:

/Yesterday I bought Apricot "n" Almond Choices in your shop for my elderly mother as a gift of Mother's day. Returing home, I gave it to her and she was really pleased to receive such a nice gift, and then she opened it. But there were only four pieces in the bag that should have contained five pieces. Noticing that, she got so mad at this blunder, and the feeling of celebration disappeared. Now, I really want to make up for this. Do you have any idea for this? I'd like you to help me./

/It must contain 5, because there are 5 people in my family./

/I think cookie monster ate cookie, so could you change this for a new one? And please catch the cookie monster as soon as possible./

/I am sorry that I have to inform you that, believe or not, when I opened the box, a cookie monster came out and run away with his mouth filled with one biscuit. I run after him, but he was much faster than I expected and so I could not catch up with him. Then, now I have only 4 biscuits left, but I need one more biscuit because I have 5 children and all of them love your biscuits. If you kindly believe my story, would you mind taking back the

biscuit from the cookie monster or giving me another biscuit?/

/I take pleasure in having your biscuits one for each weak day so I am sad about this problem./

/I was really disappointed because I always look forward to eating one piece every weekday through Monday to Friday./

/Usually, one package has five chocolates which I eat each week day of one week for a little relaxing time. I was a little disappointed because of the fact that Thursday will be the final day to enjoy the chocolate./

(7) The use of wrong verbs might confuse the reader:

/Now, I really want to make up for this./

/To resolve the problem, I would like to replace this product with the correct one./

/I recommend you to remind that all of your productions directly related to confidence for you./

/I would like to tell why this amazing fact happened./

(8) Finally, two samples written by a returnee student and an exchange student from Europe represent what near-native speakers did. Both of the students proceeded, as EFL students did, from the face-saving statement to praise the product or the company, describe the problem and the disappointment, and request future action. The European student, who came from a non-UK country, did not use *but* or *however* in the text, which might be the reflection of the gentle attitude of his homeland culture:

(By a returnee student) /As a devoted fan of your products, I am writing to address my utmost disappointment over your Apricot “n” Almond Choices. . . . To my greatest dismay, the product I had purchased at Sainsbury’s supermarket was short of one biscuit, containing only four pieces in the package. . . . Since I have just realized your product

lacks in content, I am only attaching the package. I still hope this may assist you in investigating this matter and in product-improvement./

(By a European student) /I am a big fan of your products and I buy a bag of your Apricot “n” Almond Choices every time I go to England. Your products have always been to great satisfaction. There has never been even the slightest of mishaps, until now. After my last trip to England when I opened my bag of Apricot “n” Almond Choices I found only four biscuits instead of five. I have very much looked forward for these biscuits and I am just wondering if there is anything you can do? (end of the text)/

4. Students’ Comments on Formal Letter Writing

I marked each student’s letter for phrases and expressions that might be ambiguous or inappropriate and commented on their writing style. In the feedback session, I shared samples by Ellie and Sue in class and had the students discuss in small groups what could be learned from the samples and what differences they saw in Ellie and Sue’s writing. After reviewing their work in class and having students exchange opinions about issues on formal letter writing, I interviewed students on what was felt most difficult for this task.

Many students were aware that there should be set formulae for this type of claim presentation, which is a good transfer from their L1. The difficulty, however, was that they did not know the appropriate phrases. Many of the students noted that they were translating into English what they would have written in their mother tongue, especially in the initial part and the claim part of the letter. Some of them commented, “I even didn’t come up with the word *missing* in order to explain the situation. That was frustrating.” Since they lacked the experience of receiving a sufficient number of letters of such a type, they had no choice

except starting with their L1 experience. They stated, “I realized how much my writing is affected by how I write in my mother tongue. I wrote the letter in English, but it actually presented how I would react in Japanese.” At the same time, they were also aware of the possibility of making a statement that might not be appropriate in English. This suggests that they were experienced enough to consider that direct translation might not make sense in L2. About half of the students searched samples on the Internet, but some were on legal matters while others were simple business letters. They were unable to identify which style was appropriate for their purpose, which further confused them. They did not realize that asking someone to check their writing was a possible option. The second assignment can be to revise the letter with help from an L1 speaker. The gap between the writer’s intention and reader’s perception can be clarified in the revision process.

“Why can’t we use practical English?” The students’ frustration came from the fact that they were unable to be appropriately creative and informative after their six-year English learning in secondary education. Certain students acknowledged that their writing should sound polite, but at the same time felt awkward about being wordy and indirect. In the interview, they shared their frustration about not knowing the difference between polite and impolite, correct and incorrect, and appropriate and inappropriate. Using modest expressions and not being aggressive are important for Japanese speakers, which must be explicit in their language use. Understanding the context is one thing while making an appropriate statement according to necessity is separate knowledge based on experience. If there is no one who will check their English expressions to point out problems and errors, EFL writers will not notice about their writing skills that are not sufficient enough. Raising awareness that their vocabulary, grammar, and style

may not deliver the right message is one thing that English teachers can introduce in class.

“But, what can we do? It is inevitable that we don’t have linguistic competence for writing such a letter because we don’t have direct contact with L1 speakers.” The students claimed that in their English classes at secondary schools they did not learn differences of formal and informal expressions very thoroughly. But in actual use, the level of formality is of extreme importance. Addressing the company with an appropriate term of address is already a challenge for Japanese EFL learners. The students know difficult words that they have never used, but do not possess the sense of what pragmatic meaning each word would have in the actual context. One student contended, “English is not a tool that is useful to me for real communication, but rather something that I have to memorize. Whether the expression I write makes sense to native speakers is not my concern when I write in English.” Communicating the writer’s intent is difficult even though the students had sufficient time to write the letter at home and revise it. One student made an interesting statement; “I am more afraid of making errors in speech than in writing because any writing after struggling for a while looks good to me.”

Grammatical competence that is not strong enough may cause a problem, as seen in expressions such as “I would like to replace this product with the correct one” (meaning “I would like you to replace this product with the correct one”) or “I would like to tell why this amazing fact happened” (meaning “I would like you to inform me why this happened”). These errors originate from the Japanese syntactic rule that does not always specify the agent of each verb. It seems that the students arranged words available in their vocabulary in the order of their L1 without considering the relationship between the agent and the patient of the action. Expressions too direct also

may affect the readers' willingness to understand the situation, especially when expressions too polite and too straight-forward are mixed within a short passage. These expressions will cause misunderstanding on the readers' side and may even create a sense of hostility and have them dismiss the letter. If it were a letter for a more serious purpose such as job application, knowledge of adequate word choice and grammatical structure, namely strategic capability for appropriate lexical and grammatical choices for the context, could be indispensable in order to make a logical and refined statement.

5. Current Arguments on EFL/ESL Writing and their Application in Classroom

Knowledge of L2 grammar that is not yet established may result in undesirable reactions on the reader's side. As proved by Llach's table (Table 2.3, 2011, p. 29), L2 errors are typically caused by L1 transfer (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Yamashita & Jiang, 2010). Mauranen (2012) points out common grammatical errors by EFL writers such as on the use of prepositions, determiners, suffixes, agreement, and connecting devices. Insufficient knowledge of different registers may be another cause of written products that may be too bookish or casual. "L2 learners tend to overuse expressions from informal spoken mode" (Mauranen, 2012, p. 149). EFL learners must acquire specific genre features and use them in an appropriate context (Dressen-Hammouda, 2012; Zhu, 2012).

A message might not be perceived meaningful or polite if certain features were absent in formal writing. As Stroud & Wee (2012) argue, these originate from translanguaging practice by means of translanguaging, resemiotization, transcontextualization, and transculture repositionings. Similar ideas have been proposed by Blackledge & Creese (2010), Garcia (2009),

Iedema (2003), Rampton (2011), and Richardson-Bruna (2007). EFL writers do not have a stereotypical view of a formal letter from the beginning. They have to rely on their L1 strategy for word choice and style (Stroud & Wee, 2012) if they have not had enough experience of confronting with such a context. "L1 interference results in poorer L2 writing, because learners directly transfer the rhetorical conventions of their L1, which are often different from those of the L2" (Llach, 2011, p. 45).

Writing, especially letter writing, is a personal activity. Any writing, however, is produced by combining existing resources from multiple contexts. According to Hewings and Hewings, these multifaceted contexts are the layer of local linguistic context, wider linguistic context, local situational context, and wider socio-cultural context (2005, p. 20). Lillis's (2013, p.103) seven analytical categories present linguistic resources: contextualisation, entextualisation, recontextualisation, rewriting, intertextuality, manifest intertextuality, and constitutive intertextuality or interdiscursivity.⁴ Language use is bound with specific contexts in prior circumstances of certain language use, which demands "a writerly engagement with texts" (Cheng, 2008, pp.66-69)⁵. Repeating or rephrasing the request, which is an effective way to persuade, was not observed in the EFL samples examined here. As Mauranen (2012) asserts, repetition from simple restatement to rephrasing is common among EFL speakers, but not among those students. This may derive from the fact that Japanese EFL writers are inexperienced with different types of writing models. The process approach, in which meaning is created in several stages, is an effective instruction method for EFL writing. However, as Jenkins and Hinds contended more than a quarter-century ago,⁶ it could be of significant help if a product approach is employed in certain EFL writing activities in order to help students acquire standard models to which they could refer for later writing needs. Non-

native speakers are capable of acquiring socio-cultural linguistic competence, and they need to be exposed to such experiences in the early stage of their formal English learning.

Notes

- 1 Lillis divides everyday writing into two main categories: one driven by everyday needs and interests and another driven by institutional demands and regulations. Letter writing, along with emails, notes, and texting, is included in a subcategory of personal communication in everyday needs and interests. See Lillis (2013) p. 77.
- 2 A new term, English as a lingua franca (ELF), has been proposed recently instead of EFL. The term better reflects the current situation in which English acts as an interlanguage among learners of different L1 backgrounds. For a definition of ELF and related issues, see Durham (2014) pp. 1-13, Flowerdew (2012) pp. 131-133, and Klimczak-Pawlak (2014) pp. 24-38.
- 3 Examples from students' actual writing are given as they are. Corrections on grammar and spelling are not made here. Phrasal examples are shown in italics while clausal examples are placed between slashes.
- 4 For the definition of these terms, see Stroud and Wee (2012) pp. 168-189.
- 5 Cheng defines a *writerly* reader as a learner who is sensitive about rhetorical devices. "He or she constantly considers the writer's perspective at various points, predicting what rhetorical choices the writer will make and comparing the actual development of the text with his or her own envisioning of it. In other words, a writerly reader, while reading, is actually writing the texts being read through and for the writer" (2008, p. 67)
- 6 "Inexperienced young writers find it very difficult to produce writing for a specific reader.... students feel they are ill prepared to deal with the specific writing needs required in their professions and ... they are concerned with the relevance of the instruction they receive in their ESL programs" (Jenkins and Hinds, 1987, p. 343). I do not intend to defy the importance of process writing. As Eskildsen explains with more specific terms, "language learning is item-based, going from formulas via low-scope patterns to fully abstract constructions.... semi-fixed linguistic patterns, here operationalized as utterance

schemas, deserve a prominent place in L2 developmental research" (2008, p. 335). The balance between English as a lingua franca and its usage in wider socio-cultural contexts may deserve a more serious attention.

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Appendix I:

Sample letters by a seven-year old girl and an educated adult (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001, pp. 41–42)

34 Newtown Drive
 Ellington, Newtown.
 NNX 4NT
 Telephone 01273 621 331

13th February, 2000

Dear Sir,

When I opened my toffee crunch corner I was really surprised to see that there weren't any chocolate rings in there. Please can you make sure you put some chocolate rings in next time.

“DON'T FORGET”

Yours faithfully

Ellie Miller
 Age 7

82 Main Street
Overton
Newtown
NN5 4PG
Tel/Fax: 01273 271 544
e-mail: suesimner@hotline.com

Customer Services
Thorntons plc
Thornton Park
Alfreton
Derbyshire
DE55 4XJ

20 April 2000

Dear Sirs

Amazing to find, difficult to believe, impossible to prove! But the bag of biscuits, as enclosed, contained not 5 but only 4 biscuits!!

I recently bought this packet from your store in the McArthur Glen outlet centre, near the M1 motorway in Derbyshire. I've bought these biscuits many times before and never had any problems whatsoever, and the products have always been delicious. So you can imagine my surprise and my disappointment when I opened this packet!

I would be very interested to hear how such a thing could have happened and I look forward to receiving your explanation.

With thanks in advance.

Yours faithfully

Sue Simner