

## Text of Interactions: An Analysis of Written Discourse in Korean University Students' English Composition<sup>1)</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the features of Korean EFL students' letter writing at a university in Korea. The data comprised interviews and examples of letter writing. The findings revealed that students engaged in unique ways in which they oriented their meaning-making to broad views concerning rhetorics and components. Students' approaches involved a particular context and the recontextualized English formal letter, which reflects their textual interactions in writing. This paper concludes that specific discourse communities, life-world, and learning purposes impact on students' English writing.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Writing in English in Korea is a challenging task for many Korean students. Text has played an important role in the development of writing research and applied linguistics[1]. The term 'discourse' can be used in many different ways by different people, usually but not always involving language. Discourse means something like 'producing and receiving culturally recognized, ideologically shaped representations of reality'[2].

There are certain assumptions in a situated perspective on written discourse that has implications in textual practices in EFL writing. Firstly, any textual decisions are simultaneously decisions of self-representation. Secondly, to explore how writers represent themselves is both available and privileged in the context of writing. Lastly, we could ask the interpretive question of why a writer has made a particular choice out of a range of possible options[3].

This study discusses the features of Korean EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' letter writing at a university in Korea. Based on the above speculation, this study was guided by the following research questions: (a) What are the characteristics of the rhetorical patterns in students' letter writing? (b) How do the students' texts become visible through their writing practices?

### 2. The Study

Rhetoric is defined as 'styles of expression' or 'patterns of discourse', and it is beyond the word and sentence level in a written text. The important differences between letter writing in Korean and in English can be categorized into three dimensions: (i) addresses, (ii) the position of date and signature of the writer as conclusion, and (iii) the organization of body as internal content.

In letter writing in Korean, there are distinct forms which begin with directly the salutation or narrative without the indication of the addresses of the writer and the reader. The date of writing goes to the end of the letter with the name of the writer. The body of the letter, in particular in the personal letter, tends to begin with a warm-hearted opening related to the weather, using an indirect approach. Many aspects of letters written in Korean and in English are quite different from each other in terms of the forms, functions and the way of writing contents.

The data comprised interviews with students and ten examples of English letters out of thirty-five ones. The letter writing instruction for a job application held the promise of inviting students to write about their own plans, experiences, and voices by valuing a variety of expressions. The ten pieces of writing were studied in accordance with the qualitative analysis. To analyze the letters, the 'Goal-Will' pattern was developed from the 'Goal-Achievement' model. Its component parts are (i) Goal, (ii) Situation, (iii) Self-evaluation, and (iv) Will

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toward the Goal[4].

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Some students started with Situation rather than Goal. This reflects the Korean convention of writing and is associated with the findings of research on contrastive rhetoric. One major difference between L1 and L2 writing is the thought patterns of written texts, and this can be a significant cause of writing problems of EFL students. Ten students had different access to the rhetorical patterns for their writing in the same recontextualized setting. They created entirely different text structures from one another, and nobody shared the same patterns. This indicates that each student attempts to bring a different way of discourse as 'negotiated meaning' to the learning of writing. Students continuously bring together their views of learning and making decisions in their own perspectives. This implies an understanding of the relationship between writing and social context. That is, the students' content and rhetorical patterns link to the broader context of culture.

Regarding the diversity of the students' texts, six students included the full components: address, date, salutation, body, complimentary close, and signature. Two students put the titles, two wrote addresses in the top-middle of the letter, three omitted their signatures, and four omitted 'Dear'. Two students put 'skip 4 lines', and one put '2 bytes' to separate out the each component of the letter. Two used a strategy of 'petition', i.e. 'Please give me life's one-time opportunity and allow me work for you' and 'Please allow me entering your company'. Five students started with 'Dear Dr. Johnson', 'Dear Prof. Johnson', or 'Dear Mr. Johnson'.

It is worth noting that all the students moved towards conventionality and their products revealed a variety of contents. Their strategies to convey meaning-making were also various, and nobody applied the Korean convention of weather for the opening. This reflects that the students attempted to reorganize the recontextualized English formal letter in which they are reluctant to include the Korean cultural convention of letter writing. This indicates their 'accommodation' for the textual interactions with English letter writing[5].

### 4. Implications

This study has examined Korean university students' textual structures and knowledge on English writing. Students' learning of English writing was a process of meaning-making in a given context. The students'

primary pattern of the text was a transformation from convergence to divergence, which showed integrated patterns of engagement. In addition, the students adopted a variety of strategies to convey their recontextualized fictional purposes for writing. This study thus is evidence which supports the social cultural framework that learning is a situated activity acquired from meaningful participation in a specific community.

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