

Three Characteristics of Japanese College Students' E-mail Writing*

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Abstract

This paper discusses three characteristics of college students' writing strategies observed in their e-mail messages; 1) direct quotations from Japanese-English dictionaries, 2) Romanized transliterations of Japanese words, and 3) direct quotations from reference books. A corpus compiled from students' e-mail writing was analyzed with the concordancer program. Results showed that students with lower English proficiency used a wider variety of vocabulary including less frequently used words. This contradicted the authors' expectations that they would write shorter sentences with frequently used words. In order to probe into the causes of such a contradiction, a retrospective survey was conducted to investigate the students' writing strategies utilized in their e-mail postings. The corpus analysis and the retrospective survey results supported three characteristics in the students' e-mail writing. Based on those findings the following teaching implications were proposed: Students should be taught 1) the effective use of dictionaries, 2) how to paraphrase when they use romanized Japanese words, and 3) how to use sources appropriately when quoting.