Distinctive Features of L2 Writings
by Japanese Senior High School Students

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1. Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is as follows:

(1) To examine the distinctive features of students' writing

(2) To divide the students into three level groups (a high group, a middle group and a low group)

and investigate the distinctive features in-group and between groups.

2. Research Questions

The research questions are as follows;

Research Question A

Which measurements of evaluating students' writing proficiency correlate with scores of the examination giving in English classes?

The sets of measurement of evaluating students' writing proficiency

> (1) the total number of words
> (2) Mean Length of Utterance (MLU)
> (3) the number of error words
> (4) the number of error words / the total number of words
> (5) the number of sentences which have errors
> (6) the number of sentences which have error / the total number of sentence

Research Question B

Which measurements of evaluating students' writing proficiency well reflects level groups

Research Question C

What types of errors frequently appear in each level? Are they different among the level groups?

3. Method

3.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study were 72 Japanese male students, who were in the third year of senior high school, and enrolled in 'English Writing Course' as one of the required subjects.

3.2 Data

In-classroom-essays, entitled 'If you go to a desert island, what will you bring?' were used as data. In writing, the students were given fifteen minuets and allowed to use any kind of dictionaries.

3.3 Data analysis

First of all, the students were divided into the three level groups based on the end term
examination score.

Three level groups (N=72)

Group	Number	Percentage of total number
High (H)	20	Upper 30%
Middle (M)	27	Middle 40%
Low (L)	25	Lower 30%

Then the data were analyzed in groups to find out the features and error types of the student's writing in each group (concerning Research Question A and C). They were also analyzed between groups to investigate the measurement which indicates the features of the level groups (concerning Research Question B).

4. Results

4.1 Research Question A

In this section, the correlation between each measurement and the score of the examination were indicated.

4.1.1 High group

Table 1 indicates the correlation between each measurement and the score of the examination in High Group.

Measurement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
r- value	0.51*	0.25	-0.26	-0.03	0.009	-0.131

$**=p<0.01 \quad *=p<.05$

4.1.2 Middle group

Measurement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
r- value	-0.0065	0.19	0.13	0.11	-0.10	0.20

**=p<0.01 *=p<.05

no correlation was found

Table 2: Correlation between each measurement and the score the examination in Middle Group

4.1.3 Low group

Measurement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
r- value	0.132	0.347	-0.36	0.09	0.141	-0.115

**=p<0.01 *=p<.05

no correlation was found

Table 3: Correlation between each measurement and the score the examination in Low Group

4.2 Research Question B

In this section, the distinctive differences between groups are indicated as a result of t-test.

4.2.1. Between groups (1): Low group and Middle group

Measurement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
t- value	-2.1	1.3*	0.8	1.2	-2.2	1.4*

df =52   **=p<0.01 *=p<.05

4.2.2 Between groups (2): Middle group and High group

Measurement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
t- value	-0.3	0.02	2.2**	2.3	-1.1	-2.7

df =47   **=p<0.01 *=p<.05

4.3 Research Question C: The error types

In this section errors in students' writing are divided into nineteen categories. The number of errors in each group(H, M, L) is shown below.

4.3.1 Categories of error type

| 1.don't understand	Sentences or phrases that do not make sense	The thing is sorrow most
2.incoherent	Almost same mistake with1	
3.missing	drop out the needed word	I go to ( ) desert island.
4.not necessary	put the word that is not needed	Like the Hawaii

5.rearranged	Managed to make sentence but need to rearrange the phrase to understand easily	I <u>don't dislike</u>.
6.reworded	need to change the word	food and <u>cloth</u>
7.wrong argument	Mistake of argument of number	There three tool <u>is</u>…
8.wrong comparative	Mistake of the form of noun that is used for comparative	<u>much good</u>
9.wrong determiner	Mistake of using determiner	<u>A</u> apple and knife…
10.wrong form	Mistake of the form of the word	I would <u>brought</u>…
11.wrong number	Mistake about the number	some knife
12.wrong part of speech	Sentence or phrase that is ungrammatical	I became <u>complete</u> sad.
13.wrong punctuation	Mistake of putting period or comma	(missing comma)
14.wrong sentence order	Unnatural sentence order	…., <u>firstly</u>.
15.wrong spelling	Mistake of spelling	<u>dessert</u> island
16.wrong tense	Mistake of tense	I <u>died</u> here.
17.wrong word order	Unnatural word order	It is necessary not…
18.wrong mode	Mistake of choice of mode	If I had gone to a desert island, I would have brought…
19.don't know English words	Using Japanese word	*Kakinotane* (a kind of snack)

Category No.1-17 (Kodachi,2002)

Category No.18,19 (Murakami, 2003)

Examples No.1-19 (from data)

4.3.2 The number of errors in each group (H, M, L)
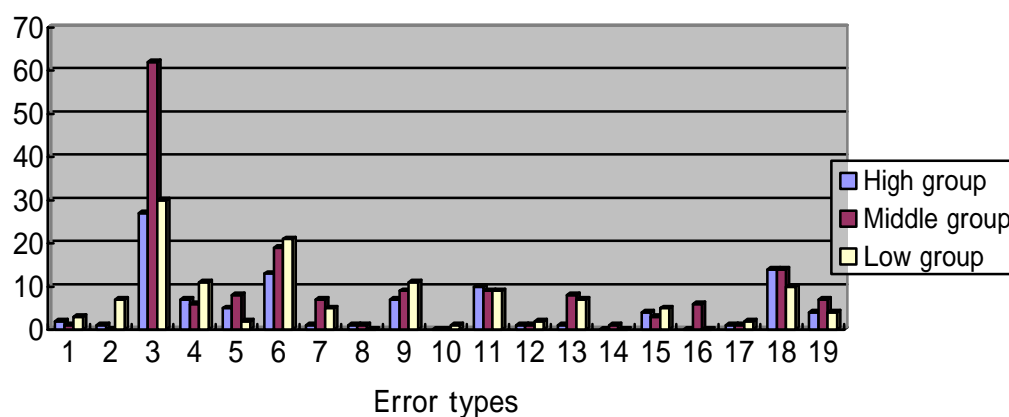
5. Research Findings and Discussion

5.1 Research Question A

In high group, there was only one correlation between the examination score and the measurement, which was the total number of students' essay. On the other hand, no correlation between the examination score and the measurements was found in middle group and low group. This result indicates that either examination items or the measurements I adopted in this study is not appropriate to evaluate the proficiency of students' writing. Therefore I need to look into the more detail in the further studies.

5.2 Research Question B

As the results of t-test (see 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.) indicated that the distinctive features which differ in the low and middle groups are (2) MLU and (6) the number of sentences which have error / the total number of sentence. These results suggested that as the students improve their writing proficiency, they tend to come to write much more correct and longer sentences. This is also applied the distinctive feature which differ in the middle and high group. The students in the high group made the less errors than these in the middle groups.

5.3 Research Question C

Error category No.3: (word) missing appeared most frequently in three groups. It is suggested that the students in all level groups tend to miss articles or prepositions that are needed in their writings.