

Individual Paper Session 6
Reading and Writing
Tuesday, July 4
1:45-2:15pm

**Learner characteristics and their effects on the development of writing skills in
Japanese as a second language**

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The paper presents findings of an ongoing project which investigated the impact of two background variables (i.e., study experience and first language) on the development of various aspects of the Japanese writing system. Many students enrolling in second-year Japanese at university are post-secondary (i.e., they completed Year 12 Japanese at school). They study together with students who started Japanese at university (i.e., are post-beginners) in the same class. The intensity of instruction that the two groups have received is very different. A large number of the students learning Japanese at tertiary institutions in Australia are also native speakers of character-based languages (e.g., Chinese). Although there is a substantial volume of studies comparing the effects of instruction mode on L2 development, little is known of how instruction mode and L1 background together may impact L2 development in adult L2 learning settings.

The present study analysed compositions of 60 students from a variety of backgrounds in order to examine two research questions: 1) To what extent do the two variables (L1 and study experience) have impact on the development of various aspects of writing in Japanese as a second language? 2) How differently do these two variables have impact the various aspects of the Japanese writing system. The composition data were analysed in terms of length, grammatical complexity and schematic structures, use of kanji (Chinese characters), and vocabulary.

The results were compared in terms of study experience and first language. In general, the performance of post-beginners learners from character-based language backgrounds was higher on kanji use and a few other areas, but their superior performance was derived from the interaction of two background factors (L1 and study background). The results show complexity in how different backgrounds impact L2 writing task performance. The study has strong pedagogical implications for teaching a character-based language to students from diverse study backgrounds.