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Pictographs in Japanese E-mail Requests*

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Abstract

This article focuses on the pictographs in Japanese requests collected through e-mail, exploring their functions and their frequency of occurrence under different conditions. The data were also analyzed in relation to the request strategy (head act) and differences in use according to gender. The results showed that the pictographs were most frequently used among equals with the informal and indirect head acts, P2 (positive politeness strategies 2), which were often used among close equals. This suggests that pictographs are used to show solidarity among equals. The pictographs were also frequently used along with the direct head acts, B1 (bald-on-record strategies 1). This indicates that these pictographs are used to reduce the brusqueness of requests. The pictographs were also frequently used with the indirect and formal head acts, N2 (negative politeness strategies 2), which were often used from subordinates to superiors. This indicates that the pictographs are used to mitigate a request force. Female participants used more pictographs than male participants. This may be because the females were more conscious of maintaining harmony by reducing brusqueness than the males.

Keywords: requests, Japanese, politeness, pictographs

1. Introduction

This study investigates requests in Japanese collected through e-mail, focusing on pictographs. With the widespread use of e-mail, many requests are made through e-mail nowadays, and such requests are sometimes accompanied by pictographs. When people communicate through e-mail, there are no such prosodic elements as intonation and stress, no such paralinguistic elements as pauses and sighs, no facial expressions and little context, all of which exist in actual face-to-face communication. Pictographs are probably used in e-mail messages to compensate for the lack of these elements. According to Satake (2005: 66-67), pictographs also convey feelings, and pictographs are used to avoid miscommunication in e-mail exchanges.

Pictographs may play an important role in e-mail requests. The requests with

pictographs and those without give different impressions to receivers, which may influence the compliance of the receiver/hearer (H). Therefore, pictographs in requests are the focus of this study.

Usually, requests do not consist only of pictographs; that is, pictographs are used along with head acts. This means that pictographs are used in similar ways to supportive moves, i.e., a unit external to the request, which modifies its impact by either aggravating or mitigating its force (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989: 276). If pictographs play a similar role, they may have similar functions to supportive moves. Inoue (2006: 32) maintains that pictographs or emoticons serve as softeners for brusque and cold messages. Yoshioka (2006: 32) argues that pictographs are used in order to express solidarity. The functions of pictographs are investigated in the present study. According to a study by Nakamura (2000), females use more pictographs than males. Therefore, gender differences in the use of pictographs are also investigated here.

If pictographs are used to mitigate a request force, i.e., to compensate for the power difference and the distance between the speaker (or the sender of e-mail messages) (S) and the hearer (H) (or the receiver of e-mail messages) and the high degree of imposition of the requested act, the following hypotheses arise:

1. More pictographs are used when there is a power difference between S and H than when there is no power difference.
2. More pictographs are used when there is a distance between S and H than when there is no distance.
3. More pictographs are used when the degree of imposition of the requested act is high than when the degree of imposition is low.

If pictographs are used to serve as softeners for brusque and cold messages, the following hypothesis arises:

4. More pictographs are used when direct request strategies (head acts) are used than when indirect head acts are used.

If the results of Nakamura (2000) hold true, the following hypothesis arises:

5. More pictographs are used among the females than among the males.

2. Pictographs

There are different kinds of pictographs. Although they sometimes vary according to the individual mobile phone company, pictographs can be divided into the following three categories: (1) genuine pictographs (e.g., a heart mark, meaning happy), (2) emoticons (e.g., a smiley, expressing a happy face) and (3) signals (e.g., an arrow going down, meaning a bow (indicating an apology) used with such expressions of apology as "I'm sorry"). I use the term, pictographs, to cover these three categories, and distinguish them from "genuine pictographs." Examples of pictographs (genuine pictographs, emoticons and signals) from the data are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).

Table 1. Examples of Genuine Pictographs

Genuine pictographs	Meaning	Examples
	happy	*Me-ru shite cho* (Mail me.)
	cold sweat	*Mata onegai shitemo ii?* (Can I ask you another favor?)
	crying	*Baito irerarete shimatta* (He made me work.)
	sad/disappointed	*Kyude gomen yo* (Sorry for the short notice.)
	relieved	*Purinto toka yoroshu* (*Yoroshu = yoroshiku*) ** (Take a handout for me, thanks.)
	being in trouble	*Kantande iikara oshiete* (I hope you can do something to tell me.)
	exclaiming	*Onegai ga aruno desuga.* (I have a favor to ask you.)
	!, !!	*Dete* (Answer the phone!)
	happy	*Arigatou* (Thank you.)
	broken heart	*Maniawanasoude* (I don't think I can make it.)
	showing cheerful-ness	*Hisashiburi~* (Long time, no mail.)
	emphasizing	*Kyoujuni posutoni irete kudasai* (Put it in a mailbox today.)

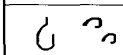
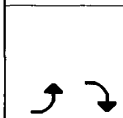
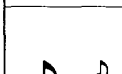
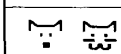
Genuine pictographs	Meaning	Examples
	being in a hurry	*Gomenne* (I' m sorry.)
	good mood bad mood, bow	*Kyou taichou waruikara 2gen yashumi masu* (Due to the bad condition, I'll be absent from the 2nd period class.)
	sigh, dash	*A, onegaiga* (I have a favor to ask you.)
	music, being excited	*Ongaku kanshouni hamari hajimeta* (I became engrossed in listening to music.)
	hesitant	*Renrakujikouo oshiete hoshii desu* (I want you to send me a message.)
	bye-bye,	*Ja souiukotode* (Ok, bye.)
	dog, cat	*Yahho* (Hi.)
	train	*Mukaeni kitene.* (Come to pick me up.)
	Sun	*Ohayou* (Good morning.)
	Mail	*shitene* (Mail me.)

Table 2. Examples of Emoticons

Emoticons	Meaning	Examples
(>_<)	apologizing, begging	*Honto gomenne* (>_<) (I'm so sorry.) *Tanomuda* (>_<) (I leave it to you.)
m(_ _)m, m(._.)m	begging	*Onegai shima~su* m(_ _)m (I hope you will take good care of this.)**
(>人<), (>∧<)	begging	*Dekireba tanomitain dakedo* (>人<) (I want to ask you if possible.)
(?_?)	question	*Kawatte moraenaikana* (?_?) (I wonder if you can work instead of me.)
(T_T), (;_;)	crying	*Machigatte keshite shimatta* (T_T) (I erased your mail by mistake.)
(*^▽^*), (0^-^0)	happy	*Kattoite kudasai* (*^▽^*) (Please buy it for me.)

**In Japanese, the expression, *onegaishimasu or yoroshiku onegaishimasu,* is often used

after a request. This is a formulaic or ritual expression. If this expression does not follow after a request, H may feel that S is not polite enough. The literal translation of this expression is "Take good care of the matter I have asked you about." Ohashi (2003) translates *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* as "I make a request and I hope things go well" and states that by saying *yoroshiku onegaishimasu,* the speaker clearly indicates that s/he is a debtor or, in other words, the speaker clearly acknowledges s/he benefits (or will benefit) from the hearer. He also mentions that such an act is considered to be polite in Japanese. However, if this expression is used in English after a request, H may feel insulted, as S has already made the request, and H will feel that S thinks him/her incompetent so that S has to remind H of the request. It is, therefore, considered to be rude. Thus, a literal translation is avoided when it is possible, e.g., "Take a handout for me, *thanks.*"

Table 3. Examples of Signals

Signals	Meaning	Examples
☆, ★	showing archness	*Ossu*☆ (Hi.)
↓	bow	*Honto ni sumimasen*↓ (I' m really sorry.)

3. The Study

3. 1. Participants

Sixty-nine Japanese university students (thirteen males and fifty-six females; mean age: 20.59; age range: 19-23) served as the participants in this study.

3. 2. Data Collection

The participants collected e-mail messages containing requests. From those they chose requests which they thought could be made public. In order to have conformity among the e-mail messages, the messages were confined to those which were sent from one person to a single other person and which were made initially, i.e., excluding requests which were made after compliances or refusals. As a result, 969 requests were collected.

3. 3. Data Analyses

The data were analyzed as follows.

(1) The data were first classified into those with pictographs and those without pictographs, and the frequency of the use of pictographs was calculated.

(2) The kinds of pictographs were investigated.

(3) The data were analyzed according to the power difference and distance

between S and H, and the degree of imposition, and a combination of these factors, i.e., the twelve conditions (see Appendix).

(4) The data were analyzed in relation to the head acts. The number of the pictographs in each head act was counted, and the kinds of the pictographs were investigated along with the head acts. The data were analyzed in relation to the most frequently used head acts under the twelve conditions.

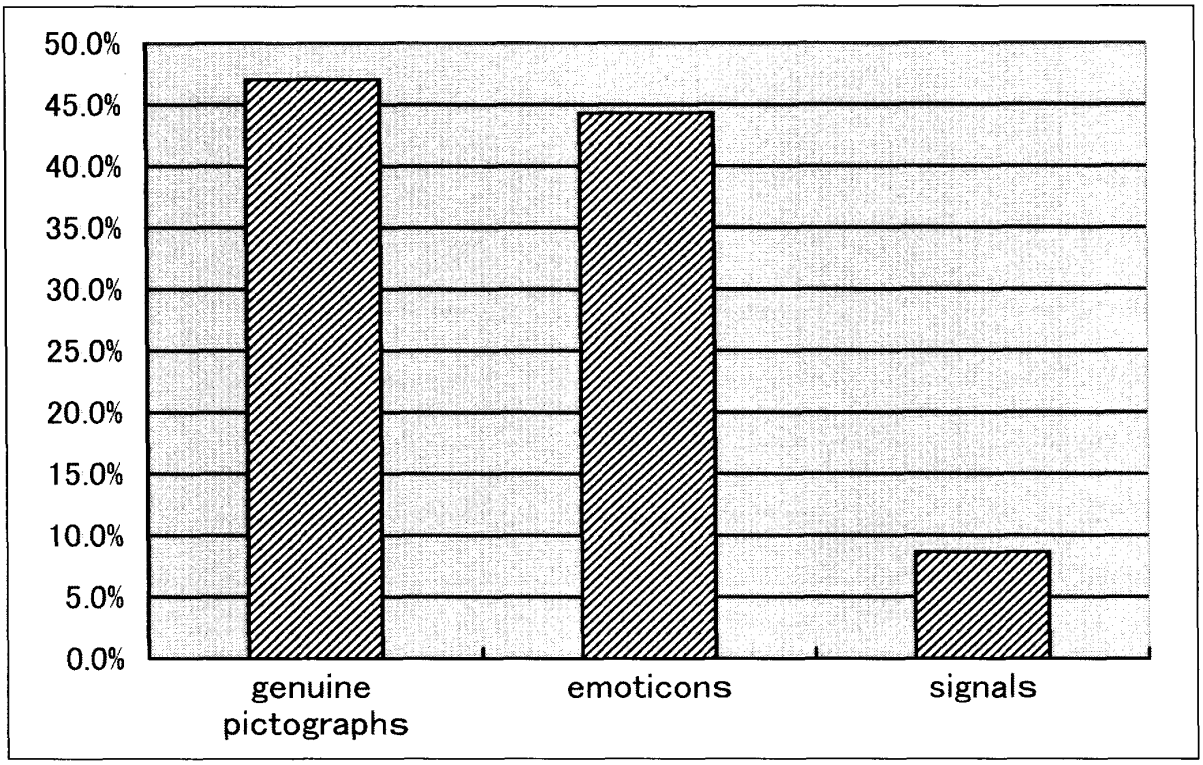
(5) The data were analyzed with a combination of the pictographs and the gender of the sender and the receiver of e-mail messages: (1) from female to female, (2) from female to male, (3) from male to male and (4) from male to female.

4. Results

The results of the first analysis (the use of pictographs) tell us that 66.4% of the requests collected in the present study were made with pictographs.

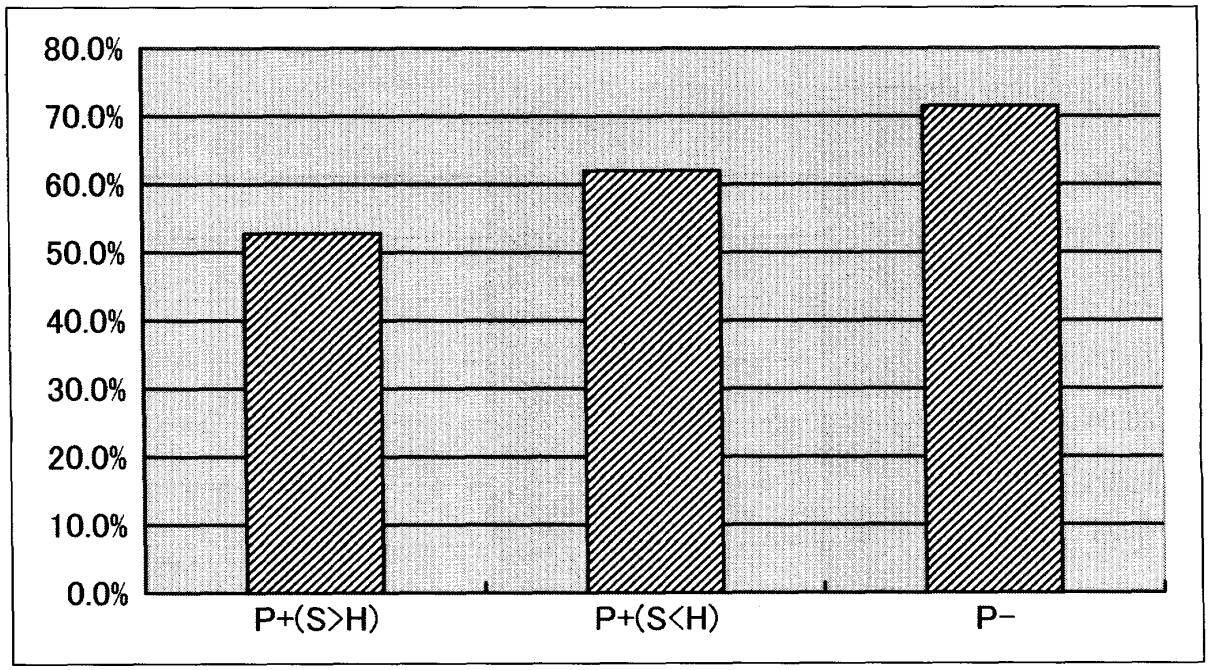
The results of the second analysis (the kinds of pictographs) show that among the three categories of pictographs (see Section 2), genuine pictographs were most frequently used (47.04%), followed by emoticons (44.32%) and signals (8.64%) (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Pictographs Overall



The results of the third analysis (the data analysis according to power difference, distance between S and H and the degree of imposition, and the twelve conditions) show that pictographs were used most frequently (71.5%) when there was no power difference between S and H. When S had more power than H (S>H), 52.8% of the requests were with pictographs, and when H had more power than S (S<H), 62.0% of the requests were with pictographs (see Graph 2). A major difference was not found in the use of pictographs when there was a distance (62.8%) and when there was no distance (67.1%) between S and H. Between a high degree of imposition (64.3%) and a low degree of imposition (67.4%) there was no major difference in the use of pictographs. From these findings, hypotheses 1 (more pictographs are used when there is a power difference), 2 (more pictographs are used when there is a distance between S and H) and 3 (more pictographs are used when the degree of imposition is high) were rejected.

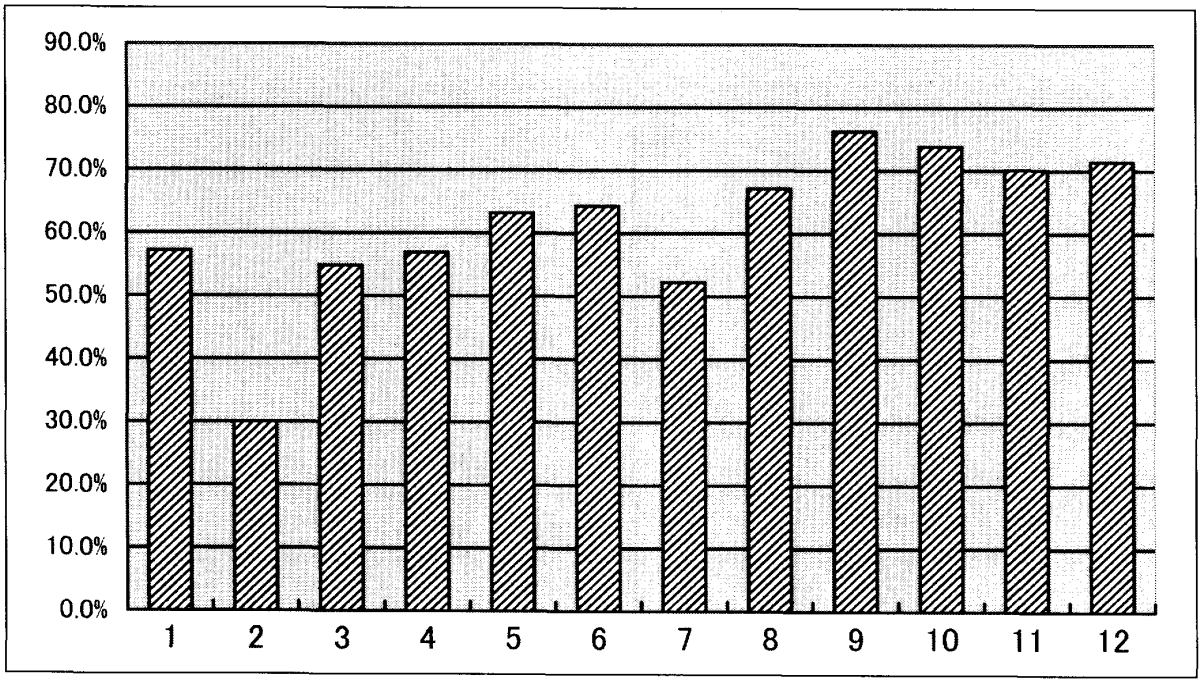
Graph 2. Requests with Pictographs (Power Difference)



P+(S>H): There is a power difference between S and H. S has more power than H.
P+(S<H): There is a power difference between S and H. H has more power than S.
P-: There is no power difference between S and H.

As can be seen in Graph 3 together with Appendix, the results of the third analysis (data analysis according to power difference, distance between S and H and degree of imposition, and the twelve conditions) also show that only under condition 2 (P+: S>H; D+ (S and H are not close); IL (The degree of imposition is low)), more requests were made without pictographs (70.0%) than with pictographs, i.e., under other conditions more requests were made with pictographs than without pictographs. Under conditions 9-12, pictographs were frequently used (condition 9: 76.2%; condition 10: 73.8%; condition 11: 70.1%; condition 12: 71.4%).

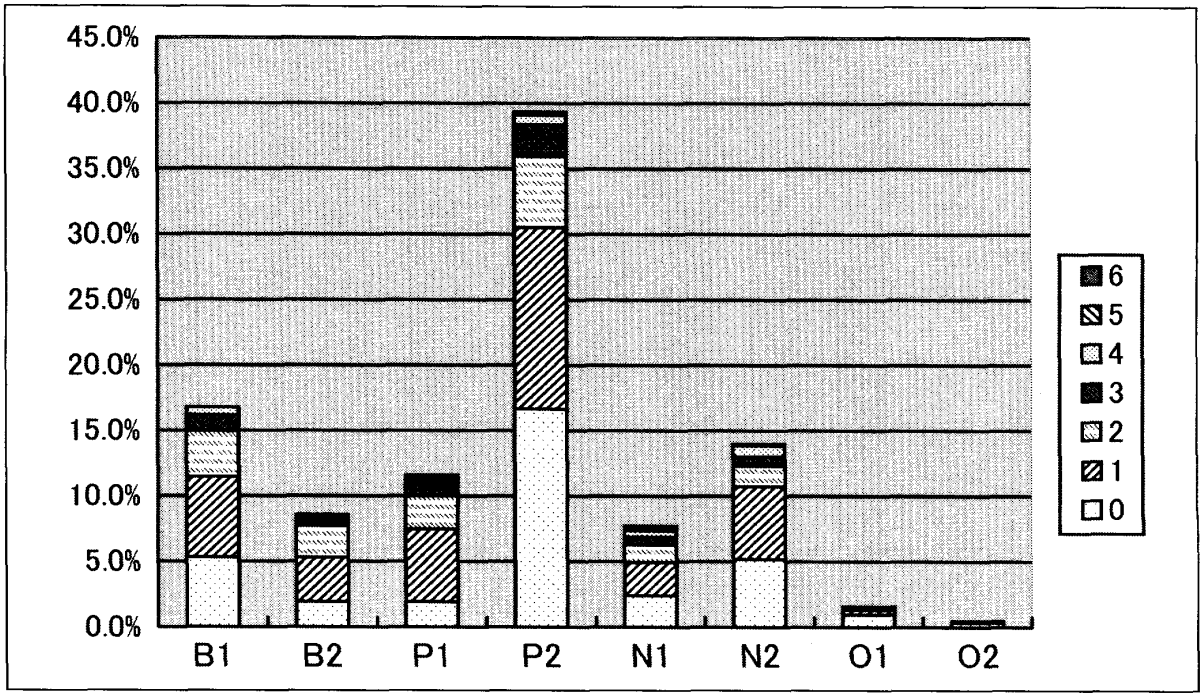
Graph 3. Requests with Pictographs under Twelve Conditions



The numbers (1-12) indicate the twelve conditions in Appendix.

The results of the fourth analysis (the data analysis in relation to the head acts) show that the number of pictographs used in each request did not exceed six. One pictograph was most frequently used. Pictographs were most frequently used along with the head acts, P2 (positive politeness strategies 2) (36.8%) (see Graph 4). From this finding, hypothesis 4 (more pictographs are used when direct request strategies are used) was rejected. The kinds of pictographs used along with each head act are shown in Graph 5. Genuine pictographs and emoticons were more frequently used than signals with any head act (see Graph 5).

Graph 4. The Number of Pictographs Used in Each Head Act



B1-O2: Head Acts (See notes to Appendix)

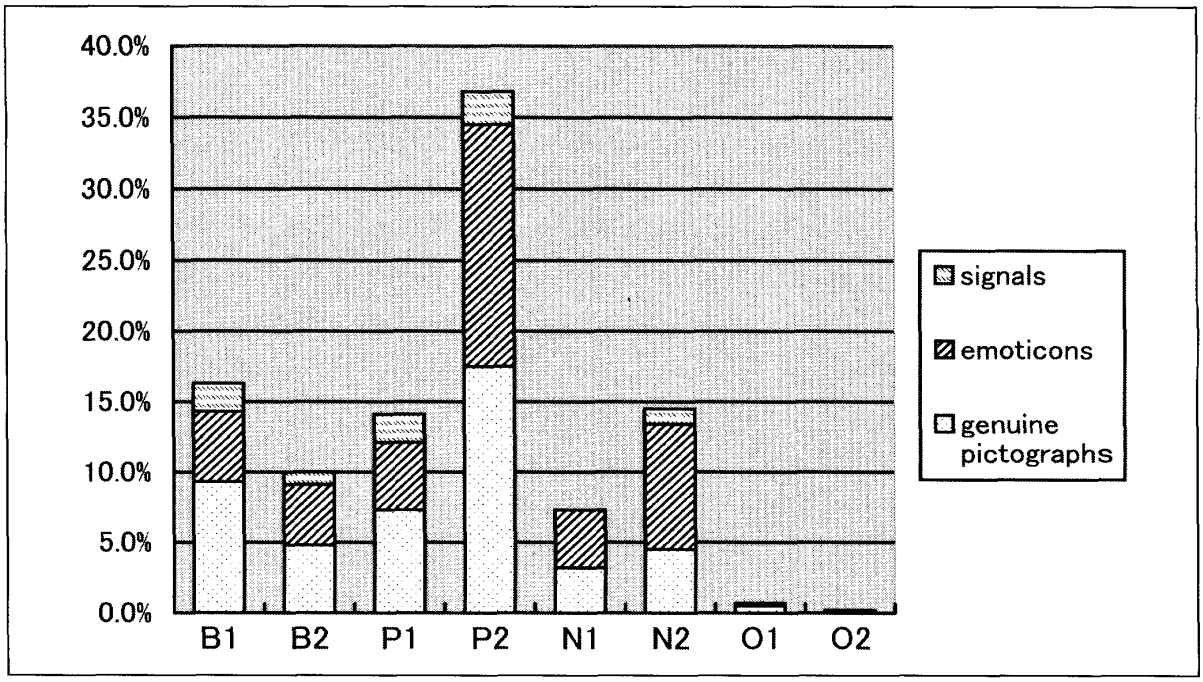
B1=bald-on-record strategies 1　B2=bald-on-record strategies 2

P1=positive politeness strategies 1　P2=positive politeness strategies 2

N1=negative politeness strategies 1　N2=negative politeness strategies 2

O1=off-record strategies 1　O2=off-record strategies 2

Graph 5. The Kinds of Pictographs Used in Each Head Act

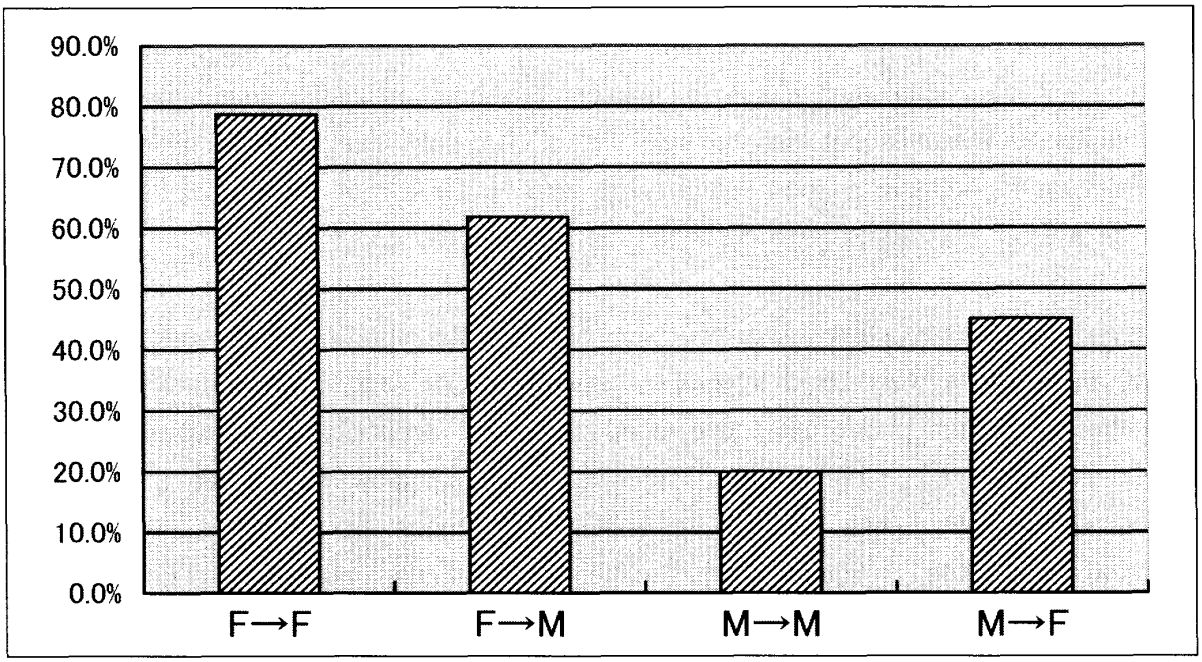


B1-O2: Head Acts (See notes to Appendix)

B1=bald-on-record strategies 1　B2=bald-on-record strategies 2
P1=positive politeness strategies 1　P2=positive politeness strategies 2
N1=negative politeness strategies 1　N2=negative politeness strategies 2
O1=off-record strategies 1　O2=off-record strategies 2

The results of the fifth analysis (the data analysis with gender combination) show that the female participants used more pictographs than the male counterparts (from female to female: 78.7%; from female to male: 61.8%; from male to male: 20.0%; from male to female: 45.1%) (see Graph 6). From this finding, hypothesis 5 (more pictographs are used among females than among males) was supported.

Graph 6. Requests with Pictographs by Gender



5. Discussion

In this study pictographs were frequently used (66.4%). This may be because requests were made among students, i.e., among friends, colleagues at a part-time job or members of a university club. This means that the situations were rather informal, and that even though there was a power difference, it was not very big. If the participants had been in other occupations or social status and requests had been made in formal settings, the results would have been different. Future studies with participants from different occupations or age groups and a comparison among them will be interesting.

In addition, genuine pictographs were most frequently used among the three categories of pictographs. Genuine pictographs have more varieties than the other two categories and they are in color, thus expressing more feeling and having more visual impact than emoticons or signals (see Table 1). This may have influenced the results.

The data also revealed that the pictographs were frequently used (71.5%) among equals. Some of the participants reported that among equals, e-mail messages without pictographs sound brusque or cold. This is how a receiver feels. Being influenced by such an impression, S sends messages with pictographs, as S wants compliance from H. It can be said that among equals pictographs are used to reduce the brusqueness of e-mail messages, and they are also used to express solidarity, as Yoshioka (2006) argues.

Furthermore, the results also showed that pictographs were not necessarily used when the degree of imposition was high nor were they used when the head acts were direct. They were also used when the degree of imposition was low and the head acts were indirect. Therefore, it can be said that pictographs are used in order to show solidarity or to maintain a good relationship with H. Or it may be that pictographs are used as a kind of softener, which is in line with Inoue (2006).

Not many pictographs were used from superiors to subordinates (e.g., under condition 2) and pictographs were used frequently among equals (e.g., under conditions 9-12). This indicates that pictographs are used to show solidarity or familiarity among equals. Although the frequency of the use of pictographs was lower than among equals, pictographs were also used from subordinates to superiors (e.g., under condition 8: 67.1%). I myself had the feeling that the use of pictographs from subordinates to superiors is too casual, but there may be a generation gap in the impression of the use of pictographs. The students, who are in their early twenties and who send me e-mail messages with pictographs, say that they feel close to me, and in order not to feel the distance created by formal expressions (they use N2 (negative politeness strategies 2) for the head act) they add pictographs. Therefore, the use of pictographs from subordinates to superiors is evaluated as positive among students. However, when I received an e-mail message of apology with pictographs from one of the staff members at my university, who had mistakenly reported my curriculum vitae, I had the feeling that she did not apologize seriously. This impression may be personal, but there seem to be differences in the evaluation of e-mail messages with pictographs according to generations. According to Harada (2004: 206), people over fifty (46.5%) evaluate e-mail messages with "face marks" (emoticons in this study) impolite. In future studies, it will be interesting to investigate how people evaluate e-mail messages with or without pictographs under

different conditions and among different generations.

An analysis in relation to the head acts tells us that the use of one pictograph was most frequent. When we analyze the number of pictographs, it is important to investigate how many sentences S uses to make a request and how long a sentence is. There may be cases when S uses pictographs at the end of each sentence (people tend to place pictographs at the end rather than at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence) and when a request is made over several sentences, many pictographs will accompany one request. In the present study, there were no requests which were made with many sentences; therefore, there were no such problems, but this issue must be kept in mind when investigating the number of pictographs in requests.

The fact that the female participants used more pictographs than the male participants in the data coincides with the results by Nakamura (2000). He (2000: 42) states that the reason for this phenomenon is not clear, but it is presumed that this is a reflection of the tendency in which females attend to each other (e.g., complimenting each other). The reasons why the female participants used more pictographs than the male participants are not clearly revealed only from the results of this study, but it is conjectured that the female participants preferred more mitigated requests than the male participants and that requests with pictographs served as mitigated requests. If a questionnaire or an interview follows in future studies, asking the participants why they used pictographs, more detailed results could be obtained.

Wolf (2000) reports that females use pictographs to show humor, whereas males use them to make messages ironic (quoted in Nakamura, 2005: 88). This suggests that females have good/positive impressions of pictographs and males have bad/negative impressions. This difference was not investigated in the present study, but if the participants in this study had similar impressions, the results that the female participants used more pictographs than the male participants can be traced to this difference. It will be interesting to investigate whether females and males have different impressions/evaluations of pictographs in future studies.

The data in this study were collected from e-mail messages through mobile phones and personal computers. When the data with pictographs are analyzed in future studies, the data should be confined only to those from mobile phones in order to have conformity in the data, because there may be differences in the use of pictographs depending on their availability. That is, while pictographs are already registered in mobile phones, they are not registered in personal computers. Therefore, people may use more pictographs when they make requests with mobile phones than when they do so with personal computers. There is also a difference between the

writing style with the use of mobile phones and that with computers. Satake (2005: 68) states that with mobile phones, people tend to write more casually (as if they were speaking) than with computers. According to Tanaka (2001: 39), e-mail messages through computers are closer to letters and postcards, and those through mobile phones are closer to memorandum and spoken language. As these differences may also influence the use of pictographs, it would be better in future studies to confine the data to those collected through mobile phones.

6. Conclusion

In investigating e-mail data, this study has revealed some functions of pictographs in requests as well as the frequency of the use of pictographs. The functions of pictographs are (1) to show solidarity, (2) to reduce the brusqueness of requests, and (3) to mitigate a request force. Pictographs were used most frequently among equals, but they were also used from subordinates to superiors. Pictographs were used along with informal and formal head acts as well as direct and indirect head acts. There was a gender difference in the use of pictographs, the female participants having used more pictographs than the male participants. Further studies on pictographs are needed to investigate requests in more detail, as many requests are made through e-mail nowadays and many of them are accompanied by pictographs.

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Appendix: Twelve Conditions & the Most Frequently Used Head Acts

Condition	Power Difference between S and H	Distance between S and H	Degree of Imposition	Most Frequently Used Head Acts***
1	+ (S>H)	+	High	P2 (38.5%)
2	+ (S>H)	+	Low	P2 (30.4%)
3	+ (S>H)	-	High	P2 (60.6%)
4	+ (S>H)	-	Low	B1 (27.8%)
5	+ (S<H)	+	High	N2 (65.0%)
6	+ (S<H)	+	Low	N2 (42.1%)
7	+ (S<H)	-	High	N2 (52.0%)
8	+ (S<H)	-	Low	B1 (25.6%)
9	-	+	High	P2 (29.2%)
10	-	+	Low	P2 (27.7%)
11	-	-	High	P2 (61.2%)
12	-	-	Low	P2 (43.8%)

Power +: There is a power difference between S and H. S>H: S has more power than H. S<H: H has more power than H.

Power-: There is no power difference between S and H.

Distance+: S and H are not close. Distance-: S and H are close

*** Head acts were classified according to the classification in Fukushima (2004), which was basically based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) following strategies: bald-on-record, positive, negative and off-record strategies. The basic feature of bald-on-record strategies is to state the request directly, while that of positive politeness strategies is to state the request informally. The main feature of negative politeness strategies is to state the request formally, and that of off-record strategies is to state the request indirectly. With off-record strategies it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the speaker. It is up to the requestee to decide how to interpret the utterance. In Fukushima (2004) each head act was further classified into two, depending on the (in)directness and the (in)formality. As a result, there were the following eight head acts: bald-on-record strategy 1 (B1), bald-on-record strategy 2 (B2), positive politeness strategy 1 (P1), positive politeness strategy 2 (P2), negative politeness strategy 1 (N1), negative politeness strategy 2 (N2), off-record strategy 1 (O1) and off-record strategy 2 (O2). While B1, B2, P1 and N1 were considered to be direct, P2, N2, O1 and O2 were considered to be indirect. B1, P1, P2 and O1 were in the domain of informal requests, whereas B2, N1, N2 and O2 were in the domain of formal requests.

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