

POETRY WRITING TO EXPRESS LOVE IN THAI AND IN ENGLISH: A SECOND LANGUAGE (L2) WRITING PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Expressing emotions (e.g., love) in another language is a daunting task for L2 writers. This article presents how poetry writing is introduced to four Thai L2 writers as a tool for them to express love both in Thai and in English. By providing personally significant written prompts, L2 writers can reflect on their personal experiences and gain a better understanding of themselves linguistically, culturally, cognitively, and emotionally. The study shows that poetry writing is helpful in creating venues for L2 writers to become aware of linguistic, cultural, and emotional use of their first (Thai) and second (English) languages. Future studies on emotions and L2 learners may focus on both positive and negative emotions in writing in different languages. These studies should have pedagogical implications for including poetry writing in the language curriculum and teaching emotions through poetry writing.

Keywords: Composition, emotions, L2 writing, literacy, poetry

Epigraph

As an intern in a College Writing course for English as a Second Language (L2) for two years, I had a chance to observe and respond to L2 students as they performed different aspects of writing. One common theme for most L2 students was the difficulty they experienced in expressing themselves in writing. One such assignment was to compose poems emphasizing significant moments in their lives or their overseas study experiences (Hanauer, 2010). One Mexican male student wrote a poem, which appeared in Hanauer (2010):

First day of going to class
First day school in America
Afraid to get in
Getting into a classroom
Sitting there

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Feeling lonely
 Everyone staring at me
 I feel like I am in the dark
 Afraid to speak
 I could not make friends
 I feel insignificant (Hanauer, 2010, p. 107)

INTRODUCTION

An applied linguist, Aneta Pavlenko, asks the following questions in her important book, *Emotions and Multilingualism*.

What is the nature of the emotional bonds that tie individuals to their languages? How do these ties influence self-expression? What are the consequences of living in exile [or abroad], away not only from one's country but also from one's language? What happens when one falls in love across a language boundary?

(Pavlenko, 2005, p. 22)

L2 learners may feel frustrated, confused, and lost as they attempt to express their emotions in another language. Their situation is exacerbated as they struggle to identify the emotionally equivalent terms that they think best represent what they wish to express in another language. This situation poses complex questions—if a person speaks more than one language, in which language would he or she express his or her emotions? If one wants to express his or her emotions, would he or she express them verbally or in written form? These are a few interesting questions that always trigger conversation among language learners, teachers, and applied linguists. Thus, in the current study, as a L2 writer and an applied linguist, I intend to explore the relationship between poetry writing and emotions from a L2 writing perspective.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate how L2 learners express their emotions through verbal interactions and how L2 users narrate their personal stories (Pavlenko and Driagina, 2007; Rajagopalan, 2004; Rintell, 1990). Other researchers show how L2 learners use emotion-laden words to express notions of love (Dewaele, 2008, 2010) or anger (Dewaele, 2004, 2006, 2010; Dewaele and Pavlenks 2002; Pavelnko 2001a, 2008a) in English and other languages. Other studies have analyzed how authors of published memoirs discuss their experiences of emotions in English (Besemeres, 2004, 2006; Hogan, 2010; Pavlenko, 2002) or in English as a “stepmother tongue” (Novakovich and Shapard, 2000). Still, others have explored the roles of cognition and emotion in the written discourse of L2 learners (Clachar, 1999). The act of writing about emotional experiences by L2 writers “entails reflecting on states of feeling often not perceived by others, and thus experienced as *interior*, rather than located in the social domain” (Besemeres, 2006, p. 36). Recently, the counter argument presented by Rimé (2009a, 2009b) asserts that emotions are not entirely individual, but socially situated and contextualized, “exemplifying the dynamic process through which individuals constantly reconfigure their experience as a function of the elements of their psychological field – events or persons” (Rimé, 2009b, p. 94).

The student who composed the poem in the Epigraph above described his first day of school in America. He felt anxious and lonely as he said that he was “afraid” to walk into the classroom. As he sat in the classroom by himself and feeling “insignificant”, he imagined

himself sitting in a dark room. Readers can emotionally understand how the student felt without an explicit explanation of his feelings. The poetry assignment aimed to help L2 students overcome the focus on form/grammar instruction that they had in their previous learning experiences. Instead, they were to focus on the content/message of what they wanted to say (Hanauer, personal communication; Chamcharatsri, 2009). Poetry helps students express feelings previously unexpressed. Agreeing with Bolton (2004, 2008), Hanauer (2010) writes, “poetry is useful for eliciting succinct, emotion-laden understandings of self experience” (p. 134). But, it is not without its challenges. Pavlenko and Driagina (2007) rightly point out that “The task of interpreting, communicating, and describing emotions in an L2 is even harder because different languages have distinct emotion vocabularies and ways of expressing emotions” (p. 91).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between love as construct of emotion and writing in undergraduate Thai students. By researching how L2 writers express love, we will gain a better understanding of the role of language used to express emotions in both the mother tongue and in L2, as people from different cultures express their emotions differently (Besemeres, 2004; Dewaele, 2010). To be more specific, I would like to report a qualitative study that investigates L2 students’ perceptions of their abilities to express love in poetry writing in Thai and in English.

THE STUDY

Written prompts in Thai and in English and semi-structured interviews were used in the data collection process.



Figure 1. Data Collection Sequence.

For focused and closer analysis, four out of nine participants were represented and were asked to express love in poetry writing in Thai and in English. The reason for choosing this emotion out of the five “discrete emotional states – happiness [or love], sadness, anger, disgust, and fear [is that these emotions] are not further reducible to a small number of common dimensions...and these emotions emerge early in human development” (Niedenthal and Halberstadt, 2001, p. 361).

The participants, during the time of data collection, were college students in Thai universities. They had never been studied abroad; however, some had traveling experiences abroad for less than 3 months. The exposure of English for all participants was limited to classroom encounters.

Writing Prompts

The participants were asked to compose two pieces of writing—one in Thai and one in English. The topics for the prompts were broad, and they could choose based on their

willingness to share their stories for the study. The students were given one hour to respond to each prompt. Immediately after the participants finished responding to the prompts, they were interviewed and asked about their writing experiences. They were asked to compose poems in relation to the topic of love, based on their experiences, in both Thai and English.

Prompt in Thai: กรุณาเขียนบทกวีแสดงความรัก

Prompt in English: Please compose a poem in English expressing your love.

In Thai society, showing affection in public is not acceptable. In fact, Thai people do not usually show affection through language, but through touching. Rarely do Thai people speak or use the language of love to show their affection in public. Instead, they may write love poems or notes to one another, a practice rooted in historical courting customs. Today, poetry is used less often in courting situations, but Thai students have studied famous Thai epic and love poems written by nationally renowned poets.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted to allow the participants to express their thoughts and emotions in this study. Interviews are one of the most widely used qualitative research tools. Their specific purpose is “to find out about another person’s feelings, thoughts, or experiences...” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p. 69). Interviews allow the researcher to learn about another person’s life history. In one sense, an interview can be seen as a way to “present a subjective reworking of the individual’s biographical concept and thus allows the researcher an insight into the hidden conceptual and emotional world of the individual” (Hanauer, 2003, p. 78).

After the participants responded to the writing prompts, they were invited to participate in an interview reflecting on their writing experiences. The interview took approximately 45 to 60 minutes for each participant. The participants were given choices to use either Thai or English during the interview. The questions investigated each of the participants’ self-reflections and their perceptions of expressing their love through poetry writing. Semi-structured interview questions were used in this study. After writing each piece, the participants were invited to immediately reflect on their first writing experience:

- Could you tell me about the poem/narrative story/opinion piece?
- What emotions were you trying to express in this piece?

After responding in writing to the second and the third prompts, participants were invited to reflect on their writing experiences:

- Do you think you conveyed emotion successfully?
- What challenges do you face in emotional writing?
- How was the experience of writing emotionally?

All the interviews were conducted in Thai. The interviews were transcribed and translated from Thai to English. All the participants’ names that appeared in this study are pseudonyms.

After the interviews were transcribed, grounded theory was used in analyzing the data. This theory “captures the *abductive* logic through which [researchers] explore the social or natural world through practical engagements with it, derive working models and provisional understandings, and use such emergent ideas to guide further empirical explorations” (Atkinson & Delamont, 2008, p. 300; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

FINDINGS

The following section features four out of nine participants who were able to capture different aspects of expressing love in Thai and in English. From 8 interview sessions, the following themes of the perceptions of expressing love in poems are emotive words in Thai and in English, (un)familiarity of written genre, and awareness of Thai and English metaphors.

Maiake

When Maiake was asked to respond to the poetry written prompt, he wrote a Thai poem for a Thai girl whom he wanted to ask out on a date. As he wrote,

เมื่อรู้จัก มักคุ้น แล้วต้องจิต หากจะคิด ตามน้อง จะว่าไหม
 น้องช่างงาม ทั้งกาย และหัวใจ กุลสตรี ของไทย พี่ที่มอง
 ถ้าเกิดโลก ทั้งใบ จะต้องแตก พี่จะแทรก แผ่นดิน ไปหาน้อง
 จะถนอมมิ ให้ใคร มาแตะต้อง จะบอกรัก รักน้อง ทุกเวลา
 หากแต่ว่า น้องจะรัก พี่หรือไม่ พี่ไม่มี อะไร ที่หุหุหุ
 ทรัพย์สมบัติ ชาติตระกูล หรือเงินตรา แมร์ตรา นี้พี่ ก็ไม่มี
 แต่สิ่ง หนึ่ง ที่พี่ มีให้แน่ คือรักแท้ ทั้งหัวใจ จากคำที่
 ขอให้สัตย์ ปฏิญาณ ณ ตรงนี้ ว่าจะมี ใจให้น้อง เพียงคนเดียว

(Maiake, Thai poem)

*When knowing familiar then touch mind
 you beautiful both body and heart
 If happen the world whole will break
 will cherish not allow anyone come touch
 If only you will love me or not
 wealth noble family lineage or monetary
 but thing one that I have give sure
 plead give vow at this here*

*if will follow you will okay?
 fine lady of Thailand I at look
 I will break ground to seek you
 will tell love love you every time
 I not have things that fancy
 even cars this I also no have
 is love true whole heart from body mine
 that will have heart give you only*
 (Maiake, Thai poem, my own translation)

The poem was written in the style of *Kloon pad* (Poem 8), in which each stanza consists of four lines and each line has eight to nine Thai words. As shown in Figure 5, the final syllable of the first line is rhymed with the third syllable of the second line. The last syllable of the second line must rhyme with the last word of the third line and the fifth word of the fourth line of the stanza.

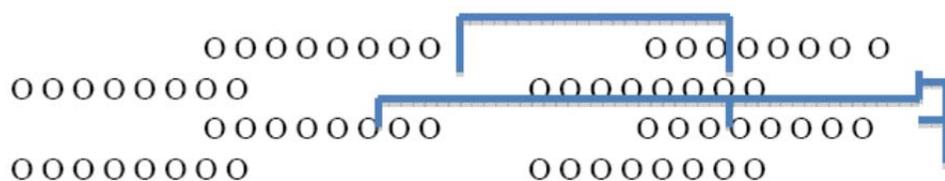


Figure 2. The Structure of Kloon Pad (Poem 8).

The content of Maiake's poem is summarized as follows: When he starts talking to her, he likes her because she is a kind-hearted person and well behaved as a fine Thai lady. If the world were to end, he would search for her to protect her from everyone. The question is whether she will love him in return because he has no cars, nor money, and he does not come from a rich family. What he can give her is love from the bottom of his heart. He vows that he will always love her.

Maiake chose to write his poem as a *Kloon pad* (Poem 8). Thai people can easily recognize this style of poetry writing because of its structure. The challenge in composing the poem by using this structure is to find words that will fit into the rhyming schemes as they are shown above. Thai poets use this style of poetry to describe the beauty of people and scenery (Hudak, 1990). This style of poetry is meant to resemble ordinary speech (Gedney, 1989).

From Maiake's Thai poem, he expressed his longing for love in the romantic aspect by expressing his love to the girl he likes. Maiake expressed his love successfully through the use of word choice and rhymed words in his poem. He used Thai words that describe his romantic feelings well in his poem; for example, he wanted to cherish her or he wanted to tell her how much he loves her every single minute. Moore (2000) published a collection of Thai words that contained the word *jai* (or "heart" in English), which he claimed have over 300 words that appeared in this book. There are two chapters in Moore's (2000) book devoted to the concept of love: relationships and romance. In the chapter on relationships and romance, there were 17 subcategories: "betrayal, bluntness, character traits, condition, effort, fear, forgiveness, hypocrisy, joy and tenderness, pain and sorrow, pleasing others, respecting others, revealing the heart, secrecy, trust and importance, unity, and vulnerability" (pp. 86-115). Another chapter on romance contained ten subcategories: commitment, cycle of romance, endearments, infatuation, intimacy, love, loyalty, study the heart, testing the heart, truth and trust" (pp. 186-198).

The word choices that Maiake used in his Thai poem also signified that he could express his romantic feelings well in Thai such as *ta-nhom* (cherish) or *ruk* (love). In the second stanza, he described that he would risk his life to go and protect her if she were in a dangerous situation. In other words, he wanted to express pure love, which was demonstrated by his desire to protect her from harm. Hence, the emotion that was expressed in this poem reflected pure love and his longing for a romantic relationship with the girl.

When Maiake was asked to write an English poem to express his love, he composed the following poem.

Some say it brings you happy,
Some talk about it sadly,
I think it's my duty

To keep it with me constantly.

 It's a sweet dream for some people,
 But also can be terrible,
 I will call it as a candle
 That can bring us light and dark.
 (Maiake, English poem)

As seen in his poem, he attempted to express his difficulty with love through the use of imagery. He tried to use metaphor in the expression of love in English. The love he tried to work out in the first English poem was a reminder or a life lesson that love has two sides: happiness and sadness. As he stated in the third line, he wanted to remind himself or “his duty” to keep the lessons that he learned from others that love can make him happy and sad.

For the second English poem, he presented both sides of love: sweetness and bitterness. He employed the candle as a metaphor of love that it can light up someone's life. It can also darken someone's life if the candle went out. To contrast this with his Thai poem, his struggle to express his love is shown in the abstract quality of his English poems. The emotion that he tried to express was not easily noticeable. His concept of love in English is philosophical or intellectual, but not romantic in Thai.

He did not use the endearment terms such as *ta-nhom* (cherish) or *ruk* (love) like he used in his Thai love poem. Readers need to read between the lines to understand the feelings he wants to express in his English poems such as the lessons he learned from others about love in his first poem or that love could either brighten or darken a person's life in the second poem. Though the English poems were short, they showed his English writing proficiency in which he tried to find words that rhymed at the end of each line. When he was asked to reflect on his poetry writing experiences, he stated in his interview:

“Talking about my writing experiences in the expression of emotion, I felt that the Thai language offers variety of word choices. It might be because I studied Thai language since I was a kid. That helps me learn new words and their meanings. However, the obstacle that happened with both languages [Thai and English] was that I read the words, I understood what they meant, but I could not use them. Like I read something and I understood what the author wanted to convey but the challenge was to use that word to express my ideas in my writing.”

(Maiake, personal interview, my own translation)

Maiake's understanding of being able to successfully express love through writing was demonstrated through the words he chose to use. In his Thai poem, he felt satisfaction in expressing his longing for a girl and asking for her love. On the other hand, his English poems contained metaphors that he used to express his love on a philosophical level. Maiake preferred using the Thai language to English in writing poetry because he felt more competent in his Thai language. As seen in his Thai poem, he employed Thai words such as *ta-nhom* (cherish) or *ruk* (love), which he did not use in his English poems. This showed that he was able to use Thai words to express his emotion. Maiake also reflected on his English poetry writing experience that it was difficult for him. His English poems employed simple words, but with a profound metaphorical understanding of love, such as the use of the candle metaphor. He felt that his choice of words in his English poems was not as explicit as in the Thai language.

In poetry writing, Maiake presented his understanding that word choice is an important aspect in expressing such emotion as love in this genre. He also demonstrated his ability to express his love from a different viewpoint. In his Thai poem, he employed different Thai emotive words. The Thai words that he used were also sophisticated, which came from his understanding of Thai poetry. For Maiake's English poem, he did not use any complicated word choices, but he was aware of the concept of metaphor in English poetry.

Em

While responding to the Thai poetry-writing prompt, Em stated that he forgot the structures of Thai poems. Instead he wrote his "poem" in prose:

“แม้ว่า เราจะไม่ได้อู่ด้วยกันทุกวัน แต่สักวัน เราจะต้องได้อยู่ด้วยกัน ทุกวัน...ฉันไม่อยาก ที่จะเสียเวลาอีกแล้ว ฉันอยากที่จะ หยุด หยุดตรงที่เธอ”

(Em, Thai poetry writing)

Though we were not together now, someday we will be together...I do not want to waste my time anymore. I want to stop, stop, stop at you.

(Em, Thai poetry writing, my own translation)

To summarize his "poem," he wrote that only time could tell how much he loves the other person. He was willing to wait till the day the other person accepted his love. He ended his "poem" by stating that though he was young, he was ready for a serious relationship. In his "poem," he showed creative use of the Thai language by repeating the word "stop, stop, stop" in his writing.

From this last statement that Em wrote, he showed his ability to express his romantic feelings in Thai language. He wrote, "Though we were not together now, someday we will be together," Em defined love as searching and longing for a romantic relationship between two people. He explicitly stated his feelings in his "poem." This technique of the repetition of a word or anaphora helped readers understand the feeling he wanted to express in his writing. He felt tired and frustrated at searching for his significant other.

For his English poetry writing, he also did not respond to the written prompt in poetic format.

"I won't say that I love you because I don't feel it now. All I can say is I do like you and I want you to be mine no matter what; even if you're in XXX and I'm in XXX."

(Em, English poetry writing)

He wrote his Thai "poem" in the prose. His expression of love in English was similar to his Thai "poem" in that he wanted to be with this person even though they were not in the same country. He was willing to wait for the return of his significant other. Em had demonstrated his English ability in differentiating the meanings of two words: "love" and "like." As he wrote in his English poem, "I won't say that I love you because I don't feel it now. All I can say is I do like you," Em did not want to "say" the word "love" to another person because he knew that the word was too strong to express such an emotion at this stage in his relationship. Instead, he chose to use the word "like" to express his emotion for his

significant other. When he was asked to reflect on his writing experiences, he stated in his interview that he could not express his love in Thai.

“I felt corny when expressing love in Thai because I never use Thai in conveying romantic feeling. I expressed my feelings in Thai in terms of endearment to my parents and my closest friends. For the English language, the writing looked okay. It looked less ‘drama’. It looked right and ‘conveyed expression’ better.”

(Em, personal interview, my own translation)

When Em wanted to express his romantic emotions in Thai, he felt awkward and nervous because he had never used Thai to express romantic love. Since he was seeing someone who spoke English as an L1, he felt a bit embarrassed when expressing romantic feelings in Thai. In contrast, he felt less of an emotional burden when using Thai to express “endearment to his friends and parents.” For Em, expressing love in Thai was the same discourse of endearment that he used with his parents and friends. One explanation for this could be that he had an actual audience for his “poem;” therefore, he felt that he had succeeded in expressing his emotion to another person.

At the end of his Thai and English poetry writing experiences, he stated that he preferred the English language because he uses English on a daily basis for his academic career and his personal life:

“I wrote about my personal experience and the experience that happened in English. I personally like English and use English everyday. Therefore, I felt it was easier to express my feelings in English. At this moment, I write everything in English. I meant I used the English language more than Thai in every language skills.”

(Em, personal interview, my own translation)

This was an interesting remark that Em shared in his interview. Though he is a Thai, he prefers to use English in the expression of his emotion instead of in Thai. This is a shift in language preference for Em. One explanation could be that the event Em referred to “happened in English ;” therefore, it was “easier” for him to express his emotion in English. In other words, he felt that it was easier to retell his experiences in the language of occurrence because he did not need to translate and find words that could describe his experiences. Another explanation could be that he had a sense of ownership of the language because he “wrote everything in English.” This sense of ownership increased his confidence in expressing emotion in the English language.

Em’s poetry writing was an interesting piece because he stated that he forgot the structures of Thai poetry. Instead, he wrote his Thai and English “poems” in prose. As he stated in his interview, he did have not many opportunities to write poems. Therefore, he stated that he could not recall any poetry convention in either Thai or English. He felt that he was less able to express his emotion in poetry writing because he had limited emotive words in Thai. In other words, his perception of expressing love in poetry writing was based on emotive words used in poems.

Mai

When Mai was asked to compose a Thai poem, she did not write a new Thai poem, but instead she recited a *Kloon pad* (Poem 8) style poem that she wrote for her mother when she was in primary school. A *Kloon pad* (Poem 8) is considered to be one of the earliest forms to read, write and, memorize (Gedney, 1989). This style of poem consists of two lines, with each line consisting of eight to nine syllables. Her childhood poem is as follows:

คุณแม่ เป็นผู้มี พระคุณ
มีแม่ คนเดียว ในโลกนี้

คอยเจอรุ่น ให้เรา เป็นคนดี
ที่รักเรา อย่างไม่ เสื่อมคลาย

(Mai, Thai poem)

Mother is who have kindness always suport for us be person good
have mother only one in world this who love us without subside

(Mai, Thai poem, my own translation)

The fact that Mai still remembered a Thai poem that she wrote when was young means this must be a very important poem for her. In her first line, she described that every mother is kind and is always supportive of her children. In the second line of her poem, she concluded that a mother is the only person that will always love us. As she wrote in her Thai poem, the love that she portrayed in her poem, “*who loves us without subside*,” signified the type of unconditional love from her mother. From the last line of her poem, she also discussed her mother’s unconditional love by providing reasons through her choice of words such as “*kindness*,” “*support*,” “*only one*,” “*love us without subside*.” Reading these words, one can feel the innocent love that she has for her mother. In other words, she expressed unconditional love for her mother. This is especially evident from the word *serm-kry* (subside), which means “deteriorate” in English, but instead she wrote, “*without subside*.” This helps Thai readers understand that there is no way Mai will ever stop loving her mother.

Though the topic that she wrote about in her Thai poem was personal by nature, her choice of words was vague and somewhat distanced. The distance that was expressed was because she did not share any personal or specific experiences in the poem she wrote. The mother that she referred to in her Thai poem could mean every mother in the world. Therefore, her Thai poem seems generic and impersonal.

When she was asked to reflect on her experience of composing a Thai poem, she stated the following:

“The Thai language is a very beautiful language. For example, if I mention the term “beautiful” in Thai, there are hundreds of ways in explaining the term such as elegant, graceful, etc. I think that if using the Thai language to compose a poem, the poem will be beautiful. It can also describe feelings like with one word; it can convey many emotions in many ways.”

(Mai, personal interview, my own translation)

In her interview, her understanding of the Thai language was apparent from the examples she gave in relation to the word “beautiful.” As she demonstrated in her Thai poem, the Thai language for her is a beautiful language. In her interview, she implied that the Thai language is suitable for poetry writing. With the combination of the language and the poetry genre, she concluded that poems written in Thai “can convey many emotions in many ways.” She

showed her understanding of the nuances of the Thai language in her interview. In other words, she demonstrated her control over the ability to express her emotion in Thai. This could be because of her majoring in Journalism that taught her to clearly understand and present her ideas in a concise manner.

When she was asked to respond to an English poetry-writing prompt, she did not write an original poem. She thought of a chorus section of an English song, *Baby, I'm yours* by Arctic Monkeys.

Baby, I'm yours, and I'll be yours until the stars no longer shine.
 Yours until the rivers all run dry.
 In other word, until I die.
 Baby I'm yours, and I'll be yours until 2 and 2 is 3.
 Yours until the mountain crumbles to the sea.
 In other word, until eternity.
 (*Baby, I'm yours* by Arctic Monkeys)

In her selection of an English song to express her understanding of love, she chose a chorus from the song *Baby, I'm yours*. From the lyric, she wanted to express her romantic love to her significant other, unlike in the Thai poem where she discussed the unconditional love of a mother. From this song, her romantic relationship was presented as being blindly in love, as stated in the first line of the lyric: “until the stars no longer shine.” She expresses love as being illogical: “I’ll be yours until 2 and 2 is 3.” The logical sense in her Thai poem had disappeared in the English poem she recited. Based on the song, Mai presents the love that is never-ending.

Mai approached the poetry writing tasks both in Thai and in English by reciting existing poems that either she wrote or from an English song. Though she presented herself as a writer who has control over her Thai language, she did not compose a new poem in response to this written task. This could be interpreted that she felt that this emotion was very personal and that she did not want to share this with someone whom she did not know well. Another explanation could be that she felt unsure of emotional expression in general. Therefore, she had created some distance to express her emotion and decided to express it vaguely.

After her English poetry-writing experience, she shared her reasons for writing the English song lyric instead of writing an original poem in English.

“Writing an English poem was more difficult because I could not even write a poem in Thai, my mother tongue. So I chose this song by Arctic Monkeys. I like this band a lot. My friend sent me this song and told me that this song was cute. I listened to it. I felt that this is a simple song but has good rhymes. It also vividly describes the love that one person has to the other. I like it. I also think that this song is one of my all time favorites. I also think that I will give this song to my boyfriend because the meaning of the song is very good.”

(Mai, personal interview, my own translation)

Mai’s reflection on her English poetry-writing experience was informative. She stated, “writing an English poem was more difficult ;” she solved the problem by providing a chorus of a song that she liked. She also stated that she could not write a Thai poem, let alone an English one. From her interview, Mai paid more attention to the expression of emotion in response to the English writing prompt. The emotion she wanted to describe in the English

song can be noted from words such as “cute,” “simple,” or “vividly describe love.” The shift that she made in response to the English poem suggested that she knew what she wanted to express because she planned to “give this song to my boyfriend.” By reciting an existing English poem to express her emotion, it may mean that she was less invested in the relationship. It could also be interpreted that she felt too embarrassed or shy to express her true emotion in responding to this written prompt. Therefore, she resorted to an existing poem to help her express her feelings.

In poetry writing, Mai approached both Thai and English poetry from a differing personal perspective. Though she recited a Thai poem that she had previously written, the poem itself followed the appropriate Thai poetry structure. In other words, she was aware of the Thai poetry genre, but she did not attempt to compose a new one. For her English poem, she showed an awareness of the genre through an English song. Her discussion of rhymes after responding to an English poetry writing prompt showed her awareness of the genre. She knew that she needed to have rhymes in her poems.

Mod

When Mod was asked to compose a Thai poem to express love, she composed her poem in the *KaapYanii 11* (Thai Verse 11):

พูดถึง รักของฉัน
เราไม่ เคยตบตี
เรารัก กันมากมาย
เพราะใจ เราอยู่ใกล้

เรากัน มาหลายปี
มักจะมี แต่น้อยใจ
แต่ไม่วาย แม้ห่างไกล
ห่างแค่ไหน เราไม่กลัว

(Mod, Thai poem)

*speaking of love of mine
we never slap hit
we love together so much
because heart our is near*

*we see each other many year
yet have but feel slighted
but not end though far away
how far distance we not fear*

(Mod, Thai poem, my own translation)

Mod composed a Thai poem in the style of *Kaap yanii 11* (Verse 11). Hudak (1990) noted that this style of Thai verse “is used for descriptions of nature and beautiful objects” (p. 11).

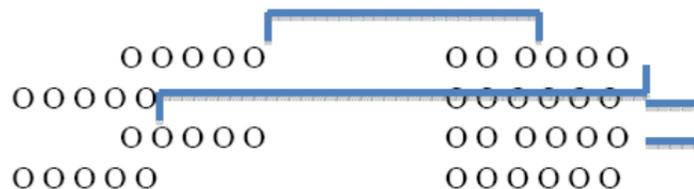


Figure 3. The Structure of Kaab Yanii 11 (Verse 11).

For the structure of this style of verse, each stanza has 11 syllables. One stanza consists of two lines. The first line has five syllables; the second line has six syllables. The last syllable of the first line must rhyme with the second or third syllable on the second line. The

last syllable of the first stanza must rhyme with the fifth syllable of the second stanza. The last syllable of the second stanza is rhymed with the last syllable of the third stanza.

Mod's Thai poem described the long-term relationship that she and her boyfriend have built together. In doing so, she expressed her concept of love as romantic love. When she wrote that they never *tob* (slap – the act of hitting heavily with palm or flat objects) or *tee* (hit – the act of hitting by using palm or stick) each other, this meant that the love that they have is built on compromise and the understanding that both of them give to one another. Though they understand each other, the feeling of *noi jai* (slighted) still occurs in their relationship. Because of their long relationship, “*we see each other many year,*” they were not afraid of being away from one another, as she stated on her third line, “*not end though far away.*” The last night of her Thai poem, she stated, “*how far distance we not fear;*” she implied that her love was built on their mutual trust.

When Mod was asked to reflect on her Thai poetry-writing experience, she stated that she felt happy to write this poem:

“When I saw the prompt asking me to express the feeling of love, I thought of everyone that I cared about. However, it was difficult to write about everyone in a poetry format. I chose to write about one person. I felt that I could express my happy feelings.”

(Mod, personal interview, my own translation)

As Mod stated, she had thought of many people when asked to “express the feeling of love.” When she knew that she needed to write in a poetry format, she knew that she could not write about everyone. Therefore, she “chose to write about one person.” More importantly, she reached a point where she could think of one person that is significant for her at the moment. This could mean that she put serious effort into composing her Thai poem. When she wrote about her boyfriend, she stated that she felt “happy” that she had a chance to express her feelings in poetry. The feeling of happiness could be noticed from the choices of words she used in her Thai poem such as “*love,*” “*we love together so much.*”

After the interview, Mod was asked to compose an English poem. She composed a short poem based on her relationship as well:

My love is deeper than the depth of the ocean.

My love for you is brighter than sunshine.

My love for you is eternal.

Together you and I could light up the world.

(Mod, English poem)

Mod's English poem was written in free form. She used metaphor in her English poem. It may be, because of her background as an English major, that she had some previous exposure to English poems. In terms of expressing her love, she described her relationship with her boyfriend. As she expressed, her love is “deeper than the depth of the ocean,” which implies that her relationship with her boyfriend has been built over many years. In other words, the love that she has for her boyfriend is limitless. The second line when she compared her love to the “sunshine” can be connected to a previous interview when she mentioned her feelings of happiness. With her “depth of the ocean” and “sunshine” metaphors, she came to the conclusion that her love for her boyfriend is “eternal.” The last line that she wrote, “Together

you and I could light up the world;” this could imply that being in love is not only from one person. It needs two people to build a relationship.

Comparing Mod’s Thai and English poems, her Thai poem is more personal and conveys emotion in a meaningful way. She provided more contextual information in her Thai poem than in the English one. Her English poem, in contrast, is generic. She does not give personal information in this poem compared to the Thai one. In other words, her English poem seems more distanced than the Thai poem.

When she reflected on her English poetry-writing experience, she stated that she preferred the English language:

“I felt that using English in expressing this emotion [love] is better because I mainly read English books, listened to English songs. It could be that I liked to listen to English songs more. I knew more English words and understood emotions that the songs tried to convey. Those songs had good and deep meaning. I meant I was more used to the English language.”

(Mod, personal interview, my own translation)

As she articulated, “using English in expressing this emotion [love] is better”; Mod felt more competent in expressing the feeling of love in English. She preferred to express her emotions in English because she felt that she had more exposure to English materials including “English books” and “English songs.” She mentioned that she “understood emotions” that were presented in English songs. This could be because she “was more used to the English language.” This helped her feel more confident in her English language proficiency. Because of her educational background, all of her classes use English as a medium of instruction, which means that English is used in classroom lectures and discussions, written assignments, and textbooks. Mod also had a few opportunities to travel abroad, which may be why she felt she could understand and express her emotions better in English.

Mod showed her understanding of the Thai poetry genre by composing a poem based on the use of specific Thai emotive words. She also made an effort to express her emotion to the one she loved because she was aware that she needed to be concise in poetry writing. In her English poem, she used metaphor to help her express the emotion. By showing an awareness of metaphor, this indicates Mod’s understanding of English poetry writing and how it is used to express emotions.

DISCUSSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The aim of this qualitative study is to investigate how L2 writers perceived themselves through their articulated emotions in their L1 and L2 writing. Previous studies on emotions and L2 writers deployed quantitative methods to investigate how L2 writers expressed their emotions (Dewaele, 2006, 2010; Pavlenko, 2005, 2006). This study provides in-depth qualitative research on perspectives of the participants’ writing experiences in expressing their emotions in L1 and L2. The issues of languages, genre familiarity, and nuanced understanding of emotion are reflected through participants’ written responses and interviews.

In terms of language, these participants prefer to use Thai (L1) in expressing their love emotion in poetry writing than in English (L2). These participants feel closer to their L1 in

expressing positive emotion. They also illustrate their nuanced understanding of the words “love,” “cherish,” and “like.” It is evident that the emotional written task helps these participants to be more reflective in their metalinguistic awareness. They can choose appropriate words in expressing their love. However, a few participants express their preference in expressing love in L2 because they feel that the English language can help them express their love freely. Due to their individual preferences, these participants feel that L2 successfully helps them express their emotions. This can challenge the assumption that bilinguals prefer to express emotions in L1 to L2.

In terms of genre familiarity, many L2 learners feel that poetry writing is difficult. However, this study has showed that L2 learners are not only able to write poems, but also capable of expressing their love successfully. Further, all the four participants demonstrated their awareness of Thai poetry by composing different styles of poems. They also used Thai emotive words in their poems with different levels of sophistication. In terms of English poetry writing, the participants showed general understanding of English poetry in that it needs to be rhymed. Several participants shared their understanding of English poems by referencing the lyrics of English songs. Hanauer (2011) points out that poetry writing can enhance L2 writers in creating awareness in their linguistics, cultural, and emotional repertoires, as he states that “[t]he specificity of the process of writing a poem may enhance a range of literacy and linguistic abilities such as the ability to handle metaphor, awareness of linguistic structures, conciseness of expression, imagistic description, emotional communication...” (p. 83).

The contribution of this study to the field of L2 composition is the use of “meaningful literacy” (Hanauer, 2012) in composition classrooms. As this study has shown, the participants in this study did not run into the problem of writer’s block because they were asked to write their poems about their significant experiences. These four participants responded to the written prompts and composed their poems based on experiences that were meaningful to them, in both their L1 and L2. Emotional written prompts may provide an opportunity for L2 writers to be more reflective in their own experiences. Hanauer (2010, 2012) asserts that the use of creative writing, poetry writing to be more specific, helps L2 writers to be more focused and more reflective on significant language learning experiences; creative writing also allows L2 writers to shift the focus of their writing from structural to content concerns (Chamcharatsri, 2009).

Due to the influence of cognitive movement and traditional SLA in language learning and teaching, writing classrooms in ESL/EFL contexts remain to focus on writing tasks and genres that are distance to them. However, I would like to argue that emotional expression is part, if not *the* heart, of language learning and language teaching. By avoiding teaching about emotions, students are nothing, but empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. This study also aims to expand the conceptual framework of L2 literacy in relation to expressing emotions in another language.

By providing meaningful and personally significant written tasks, L2 writers can write and express their ideas and emotions both in their L1 and L2. As the study has shown, L2 learners feel that they can express their emotions through writing poems, which is a genre that is perceived to be a “high” status in writing. In fact, poetry writing is a useful genre especially for L2 learners to learn in order to help them express their emotions (Hanauer, 2010). This has also demonstrated that learning to express emotions should be part of language learning and teaching. Literacy educators should start thinking of incorporating different tasks

addressing emotional expressions to students. I believe that students have linguistic resources in them; we, literacy educators, need to help students capitalize on their ability to express emotions and become ready to use resources they have in language classrooms.

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