

## CHOICES OF WORDS IN WRITING: A CASE STUDY AMONG EXTROVERT AND INTROVERT

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### ABSTRACT

*Studies have been conducted on personality and writing in the contexts of the second language. Most learners are not aware that their personality is present in their writing based on their choices of words. Hence, it has sparked the interest of many scholars to seek more knowledge in this matter. Although many studies have been conducted to study the presence of personality influence in L2 learners, little is known about how personality affect L2 writing. It includes the type of writing, the type of words chosen and the way L2 learning style would affect how learners perform in their writing. The objectives of this paper is to find out the type of personality traits possess by the participants and to explore how personality traits influences their choices of words in writing. The study adapted qualitative research method as it is a case study among two female participants in a higher learning institution in Malaysia. The participants writing documents were analysed using content analysis based on the 3 different categories determined by the researcher. The findings revealed that the most common categories occurred in their writing are 'self-reference words', 'positive emotions words' and 'negative emotions words'. The findings of this study showed that the introvert participant constantly use more words in all categories. Thus it indicates influence of the introvert's natural characteristics in her writing due to the fact she is comfortable expressing herself without the influence of outside world. She also found to be more expressive in writing compared to the extrovert.*

Keywords: Personality traits, Writing, English as Second Language,

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Personality and language are related (Brown.D.H, 2007) and has been guiding some of the teachers in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in approaching their students (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). The most common personality types discussed are extrovert and introvert. An extrovert person is defined as a person who is fond of involving in social communication and environment. When it comes to communicating, people with extrovert personality have a higher level of abstract interpretation compared to introverts (Beukeboom, Tanis & Vermeulen 2012). Among the most common characteristics of extroverts learners are very outgoing, comfortable working in and being part of large crowds. Based on the characteristics listed, it showed that extrovert learners possess a social learning style. In the sense that, extroverts tend to have acute verbal learning style. They always communicating through stories or being the first to volunteer for assignments and projects. Among the reason why they like to work with others is because they can actively discuss the idea or topic. The social and learning activities that benefit them include problem-solving with others, group projects, and learning through mimicking experiences.

An introvert person is defined in the previous chapter as someone who is private, quiet, keep their emotions private and always think before the act (Alavinia & Sameei 2012). They also like to spend time alone. Being in a crowd would make them nervous, so they would avoid being in activities that would require them to socialize with others (Bano 2012; Yadgari 2011). Hence introverts learner generally have a solitary learning style as they tend to solve problems on their own. They like to brainstorm and find theoretical explanation. According to the Myers-Briggs typology introvert learners are likely to participate less in class, as they prefer to process ideas by thinking to themselves instead of discussing with others. Although introverts learners might need to keep up in an extrovert environment, there are still advantages to this type of learning style. Introvert learners often able to listen attentively and internally process all the information. Hence they are able to summarize a discussion or articulate an aspect of it that has been left out. Introvert learners also often attentively listen to the discussion, looking for the hidden themes and come out with an outline of the discussion. Because of this, it enables the extrovert learners to cross-examine, explore and eventually provide the content of the issue. Through the back and forth process among these two personality traits learners, it shows that they need each other's learning styles to provide the diversity of a rich discussion.

At the same time, many believe that personality often influences second language (L2) learners in all aspects of their language skills. These skills include listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. It is a great idea to incorporate the two in designing classroom activities. Many studies have been conducted to study the presence of personality influence in L2 learners (Kao & Craigie, 2014; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012; Yadgari, 2011; Erton, 2010;). In learning language, L2 learners often bring together their personality into the learning process. However, L2 learners are often unaware of this matter. They often disengage their personality in their learning process due to their tendency to follow the rote-learning method provided by their teachers. Because of this, some of the L2 learners find it difficult to master the language skills specifically writing. When it comes to writing most learners write because they 'have to' not because they 'want to'. Hence, they are not connected to their own writing as they don't feel distant with their own writing. Thus, the purpose of this study is to find out the influence of personality in students' writing.

## 1.1 ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA

It is important as in Malaysia; English is regarded as a second language. Malaysia was ranked with the highest English proficiency level among Asian countries according to the EF EPI (Education First, English Proficiency Index) (NST 7, April 2011; cited in Thirusanku & Melor, 2014, p. 11). It is widely used in various sectors such as private sectors. That fact is undeniably important for students to secure a job after they graduated. There are two English Language skills that are very important for Malaysian graduates to master which are speaking and writing (Ong Teck Lan, Khaun, & Singh, 2011). These two skills are what the employer look for in their potential employee. Surprisingly, according to a newspaper article in The Star, 27, July 2013 reported that in 2011, 24.6% of 174,464 university students were jobless for more than six months after graduating. Among the reasons cited for the employment was the lack of language proficiency particularly in English. It indicates that our graduates are still not competence in using the English language especially in these two skills. This could possibly mean that our students cannot write well. Since most of them are university graduates, they are expected by the employer to be more critical and analytical in their writing. Maybe the students do not have enough vocabularies or ideas to get them inspired; hence they are not able to write well. Perhaps, there are some affective factors that missing that hinder from being competent acquiring L2 skills like personality traits.

It is known that personality traits would affect how L2 learners connect to their surroundings (Zhang, 2008). For having personality incorporated in their L2 learning, some learners find it easy for them to progress. They feel close, comfortable and familiar with the language. As each personality has a different style of learning L2, extrovert often described as better language learners compared to the introverts (Krashen 1985, Swain 1993). This is because extroverts are known to be an outgoing, sociable and have no problem in engaging themselves in random conversation. It suggest that, people with extrovert personality always feel connected and inspired when it comes to learning L2 and have higher tendency to perform better than introverts. However, there are researchers like Naiman et al., (1978) and Busch (1982) found in their study declining the theory as their introverts' respondents performed better than the extroverts (as cited in Brown, 2007, p.167). These past study showed that there is uncertainty whether personality traits would have an impact on L2 learning. Due to the conflicting issue, a study needs to be conducted in our local context to explore more about how these personality traits would impact L2 learners especially in their writing skills.

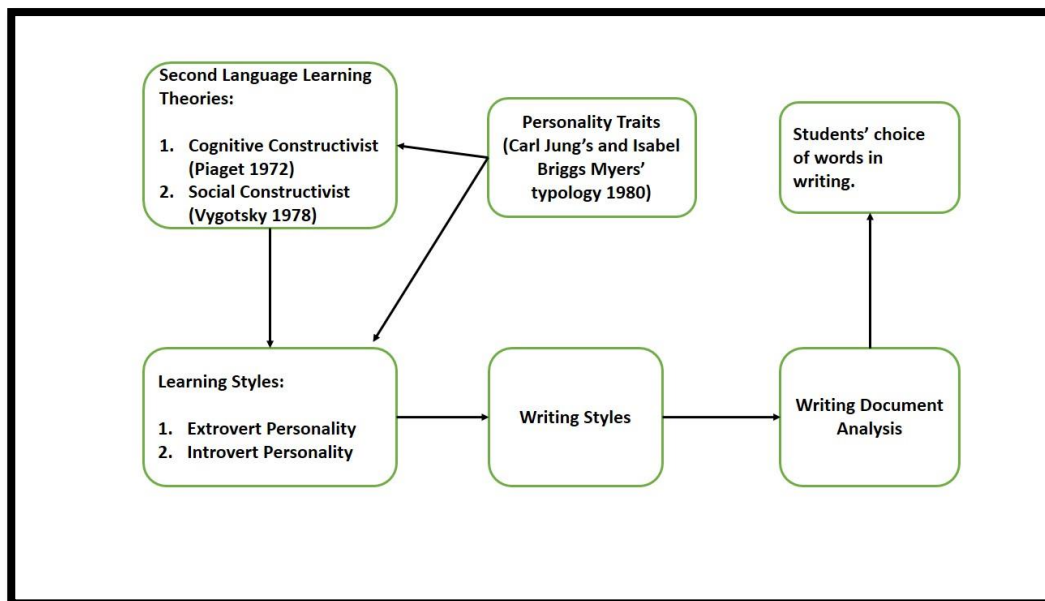
This study was inspired by how an individual can be so different from one another in all aspects especially when it comes to personality. As this study was trying to explore the potential of the presence of personality traits in learners' writing, it would give good perspectives in this area. What requires such a study and adds to its essentialness is that there has not been any apropos study to amplify the significance of extroverts and introverts in composing good written work. This study can hypothetically enhance the discovery in the connected etymological and in addition psycholinguistics.

Moreover, it can illuminate the connection amongst psychologist, language learning and teaching. The outcome of this study would also benefit the parents in concentrating on building up some individual traits in their kids which in future require a specific language skill. At the same time it is hoped that it would give language teachers what to focus and enough proof to change or adjust their standpoint toward extrovert or introverts learners.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 DEFINITION ON PERSONALITY TRAITS

Finding the right style to learn L2 could be tricky for one (Hsain Ali Suliman, 2003). There are many factors that influence one in learning L2. Learners often resort to the intrinsic side of affectivity which is the personality factors within them (Brown.D.H, 2007). Personality is defined as a distinctive characteristic of a human being consist of feelings, mentality, concepts, aims, and reactions (Alavinia & Sameei, 2012). The most common personality traits discussed are extrovert and introvert ( Boroujeni, 2015; Kayaoglu, 2013; Alavinia & Sameei, 2012; Erton, 2010) . The way people react towards the language especially with listening, speaking, reading and writing also differs according to their personality. According to Zafar and Meenakshi, (2012) everyone could have both personalities but not in the same degree. Hence, when it comes to communicating, people with extrovert personality have a higher level of abstract interpretation compared to introverts (Beukeboom, Tanis, & Vermeulen, 2012).



## 2.2 L2 WRITING STYLES: EXTROVERT VS INTROVERT

Just like speaking skill, writing is fairly important for a language learner to master. This is because it helps in delivering a message or describes a thing in a nonverbal manner to the potential audience. A good writing does not happen easily. It requires a mental procedure to control the writer's flow of writing. This is called writing strategies. This includes the choice of vocabulary, linguistic styles, the correct grammar rules and the purpose of writing. How people choose their vocabulary in daily conversation very much reflected by their personality. This is because it is fairly impossible for people to use the same choice of words to describe the same thing that they see (Kafipour, 2011).

Hirsh and Peterson (2009) stated in their research on "*Personality and language use in self-narratives*" found that extroverts have been associated with words that related to social process, communication, family and human. This fits the most common characteristics of extroverts which are known to be talkative, open, able to show emotions, act before thinking and like to be surrounded by people.

On the other hand, introverts are often characterized as someone who is private, quiet, keep their emotions private and always think before the act (Alavinia & Sameei, 2012). They also like to spend time alone. Being in a crowd would make them nervous, so they would avoid being in activities that would require them to socialize with others (Bano, 2012; Yadgari, 2011). When it comes to writing, they are always motivated from within (Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). They are often self-reflection oriented. They value the time they had for themselves and enjoyed their time alone for thinking and looks to the inner world for energy and meaning.

## 2.3 WRITING DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Language is the most common and reliable way for people to translate their internal thoughts and emotions into a form that others can understand. Words and language, then, are the very stuff of psychology and communication. They are the medium by which cognitive, personality, clinical, and social psychologists attempt to understand human beings (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). When analysing a writing text, there are a few fundamental points that will be address. First, the degree of formality involve in a written text. It includes vocabulary, slang, use of idiomatic language, phrasal verbs, personal pronouns and 'dramatic language' used to over-emphasize. Second, the style of writing such as simple/complex sentences, transition markers and reported speech. This two are the fundamental points in text analysis keep most scholars to explore more in this area of study.

Modern text analysis has been rooted since the earliest day of psychology. If a person hidden agenda can be seen on their slip of the tongue (in verbal communication) it can also be possible in the form of writing by looking at their apparent linguistic mistake. One of the first general purpose computerized text analysis program in psychology was developed by Philip Stone and his colleagues. From then onwards there has been tremendous new invention of computerized program in analysing text has been develop. Invention like Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), Natural Language Tool Kit (NLTK) and many others has given a lot of contribution in analysing the text in scientific and quantitative point of view.

## 2.4 INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY IN WRITING.

L2 teaching and learning could be a challenging task for teachers as they would be dealing with various learners' personality. Each would have his own distinctive way of learning (Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). According to the constructivist school of thought, language learning is the integration of linguistics, psychological and sociological paradigms (Brown.D.H, 2007, p. 12). There are two branches of constructivism are applicable in this study: cognitive and social. Cognitive constructivism emphasis is placed on the importance of learners constructing their own representation of reality (Brown.D.H, 2007, p. 12) which when learners learn language according to their personality traits it indicates that "he plays an active role in their own learning"

(Slavin, 2003, pp.257-258) as cited in (Brown.D.H, 2007, p. 12). It appears when learners start to write about something, they will use their own words. Words that they comfortable using when they write. Thus, it makes each learners' writing piece is unique because each and every one of them carries their voice and style.

Meanwhile, social constructivism emphasize the importance of social interaction and cooperative learning in creating the cognitive and images of reality which according to Vygotsky (1978) "children's thinking and meaning making is socially constructed and emerges out of their social interaction and environment" (cited in Brown.D.H, 2007, p. 13). This is because language skills like speaking and writing can be considered as part of social interactions. In the context of this study which focusing more on writing, is seen as learners' medium of social interaction. Thus, by learning about their type of personality and learning style would give a good insight on how they could use the right discourse and plan some effective interaction strategies in order to initiate learners' progress in L2 (Beukeboom et al., 2012; Cao, 2012; Chen & Hung, 2012; Nazari & Allahyar, 2012).

## 2.5 PAST STUDIES

Personality and language have always sparks some interest among researchers. Many studies have been conducted and researchers have found many different aspects of personality and its influence in writing (Alavinia & Sameei, 2012; Altarriba & Basnight-Brown, 2011; Beukeboom, Tanis, & Vermeulen, 2012; Kao & Craigie, 2014; Kayaoglu, 2013; Yadgari, 2011). These studies had provided good insight on the relationship of personality and writing. An empirical case study was conducted by (Mansouri Nejad, Bijami, & Ahmadi, 2012) to examine to what extent these affective factors could foretell academic writing ability. The study involved 30 EFL students participated in the study studying literature in junior level at Ilam University, Iran. The results revealed that there was no significant relation between personality and writing ability. The findings refuted the cliché that the extraverts outperform the introverts in skills like writing.

Another study was on "The Language of Extraversion: Extraverted People Talk More Abstractly, Introverts Are More Concrete" by Beukeboom, Tanis, & Vermeulen, 2012. This study was conducted to understand the impact of personality, one needs to know how personality differences manifest themselves in language use. Results showed significant positive correlations between extraversion and both language abstraction and self-reported level of interpretation. The overall findings suggest that the verbal style of extraverts is characterized by a higher level of abstract interpretation, whereas introverts tend to stick to concrete facts. Although this study focus more on the language use in speaking skill, it gives some insight what kind of words that these two personality tend to use.

While a study conducted by Kao & Craigie, 2014 on Effects Of English Usage On Facebook (EUF) And Personality Traits On Achievement Of Students Learning English As A Foreign Language found that some of the personality dimensions were related to individual variations in EUF. It means that it was a statistically significant relationship between the Big Five personality traits and EUF. The findings of the study also suggested that students with higher level of extroversion tend to engaged more in EUF and performed better in EFL learning.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

This study is a case study in which it applied a qualitative research approach. The main purpose of this study is to find out the students' personality and to explore the influence of personality in their writing among tertiary level students. Hence two research questions were formulated:

- 1) What are the personality traits of the students?
- 2) How does personality traits influence the students' writing?

### 3.2 PARTICIPANTS

To carry out this study, a purposive sampling has been selected in choosing the participants. Merriam (2009) stated that this type of sampling allows the researchers to "discover, understand and gain insight from a sample from which the most could be learned". The participants for this study consisted of first year diploma students at a local university in Malaysia and they have taken the English course namely Integrated English Language Skill. They were selected because they have fulfilled the criteria that suited the aim of this study which is to find out their personality traits and explore how personality influence their writing. The first reason, based on the first observation, the researcher found that the students have the personality traits that the researcher looked for this study.

For this study, 2 female students volunteered to be part of the study and remained committed until the end of the research. To adapt to research ethics, only volunteers should be included in a qualitative research (Merriam 2009). They were also among the students that have pass and obtained A, B or C in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) as it is a must for all diploma students to get at least those credits order to roll in the diploma course. Thus it can be concluded that they are considered as intermediate to higher learner of English, which the second reason why they were selected. Even though there were only two participants, the data collected from them is considered sufficient as the purpose of a qualitative research is by collecting in-depth information in order to understand an occurrence happened.

### 3.3 THE INSTRUMENTS

#### 3.3.1 PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire is going to be a set of adapted questions which consist of seventy-two items retrieved from the internet. Jung Typology Test is a personality test based on C. Jung and I. Briggs Myers type theory ([www.humanmetrics.com](http://www.humanmetrics.com)). It will be used in this study to determine the students' personality types.

### 3.3.1 WRITING TEST

A writing test was used to measure the students' choices of words. The writing test was done in the class where the students was asked to respond to the assigned listening task.

### 3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The items designed in the questionnaire were based on the aim of the study. The personality questionnaires were uploaded online, and the participants were asked to answer the questions during their class session in the lab. The researcher then explained the purpose of this study before giving instruction of how to answer the questionnaire. The researcher reminded the participants to not over-think while answering the questionnaire as it requires them to be frank and genuine about their personality. About thirty minutes were allocated for them to answer.

As for the writing data, the participants need to respond to the assigned listening task as part of their on-going assessment for the English subject. The writing was analysed using the categories identified by the researcher based on the previous literature review. The researcher will look on the words that fall under the following categories in order to determine how far personality influenced in the participants' writing. The categories are:

1. Self-reference words
2. Positive emotions words
3. Negative emotions words

### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The section will discuss the findings for these Research Questions:

#### 4.1. WHAT ARE THE PERSONALITY TRAITS OF THE STUDENTS?

The two participants involved in this study had different personality traits from each other. Both participants took the online personality test and answered the given questionnaire to determine their personality traits. The result of that test was each student represent the two personality traits involved in this study which are extrovert and introvert.

#### 4.2. HOW DOES PERSONALITY TRAITS INFLUENCE THE STUDENTS' WRITING?

Both of the participants' writing were analysed based on the categories determined as listed below:

##### 4.2.1. Self-reference words

Based on their writing, it was found that the introvert participant have higher frequency of using 'Self-reference words'. The 'Self-reference words' refers to words that is related to 'pronouns' such as I, me and my. In this case study, the introvert participants used 'Self-reference words' 9 times compared to the extrovert participants as she is only used 5 times in her writing. Thus it showed that the introvert participant took her the writing task as something that is very personal. The words used are as illustrated in the table 1.

Table 1: self-reference words used by the participants.

Introvert	Extrovert
1. The story <b>I</b> learnt is <i>The Dictionary by James Robertson.</i>	1. <b>I</b> am not satisfied with the story.
2. ... <b>I</b> thought the story was rather confusing to me.	2. <b>I</b> am strongly dislike the whole story...
3. ... <b>I</b> had to listen many times to understand the story.	3. The ending of the story makes <b>me</b> more eager...
4. Overall <b>I</b> dislike the story.	4. Most of <b>my</b> friends do not like the...
5. ... <b>I</b> especially didn't like stories that leaves us hanging at the end.	5. There are so many questions in <b>my</b> head.
6. ...and <b>I</b> want to know the writer's point of view...	
7. ... <b>I</b> was confused to what actually is wrong with him.	
8. ... <b>I</b> like fantasy stories...	
9. ...and <b>I</b> can't imagine things that the writer...	

It can be seen from the above table, that how both participants used the 'self-reference words' in their writing'. It appeared that the introvert participant specifically used first person pronouns – 'I' throughout the whole writing. The tendency of the introvert participant to use first person pronouns throughout the whole writing might be because she wanted to strengthen her argument

and make her perspective very clear. It was written very clearly in her writing. She also use the first person pronouns to state what she liked and disliked as well as her expectation about the story.

Compared to the introvert participant, the use of first person pronouns by the extrovert participant are not as much. Besides using first person pronouns- ‘I’ , ‘me’, she also used possessive pronouns – ‘my’. She used the possessive pronouns to describe her social circle views about the story. This indicates that the influence of true extrovert characteristic as she felt comfortable expressing her real world personality in her writing. Although there are instances that would somehow indicates the presence of their personality in their writing, the participants were oblivious about it.

#### 4.2.2 Positive emotions words

Based on their writing, both participants use almost the same amount of ‘positive emotions words’ in their writing. ‘Positive emotions words’ in this study refers to the words that the participants used to show their positive thought about the story that they had listened. Just like the previous categories, introvert participant in this study have higher frequency in the use of ‘positive emotions words’ compared to the extrovert participants. The words used are as illustrated in the table 2.

**Table 2: positive emotions words used by the participants.**

Extrovert
...story makes me more <b>eager to know</b> ...
...become more <b>interesting</b> that is beyond...
...the whole story should be <b>worth to read</b> ...
Introvert
...I <b>thought</b> the story...
...I had <b>to listen</b> many times <b>to understand</b> the story.
...thing <b>to imagine</b> about...
...I want <b>to know</b> the writer’s <b>point of view</b> ...
...another <b>fantasy-liked</b> story...
... I <b>like fantasy stories</b> ...

The above table showed the types of ‘positive emotions words’ used by both participants. The participants used ‘positive emotions words’ to describe their feeling about the story, in this case what they like about it and their expectation of the story.

As described in the previous category, words that the participant used to show their positive thought about the story that they had listened. It was found in this study that introvert participant in this study have higher frequency in the use of ‘positive emotions words’ compared to the extrovert participant. This findings were similar with the previous category. The introvert participant was very personal in her writing. It was clear that she had no problem to express what she felt about the story. She also described the experience she went through in order to get better understanding of the story. Hence, it was safe to the introvert participant do not have any problem exposing their true feeling and colour in their writing. On the contrary, the extrovert participant was less personal in her writing. The use of ‘positive emotions words’ by the extrovert participant was only limited to her expectation about the story. Hence it was not elaborated like the other writing. Perhaps, she does not really want to expose her true feeling about the story in her writing. This finding also contradict from other researches that extroverts use more positive emotion words (Pennebaker & King, 1999; Yarkoni, 2010) and fewer negative emotion words (Pennebaker & King, 1999). Hence, such generalization should be avoided.

#### 4.2.3 Negative emotions words

Based on their writing, both participants use almost the same amount of ‘negative emotions words’ in their writing. ‘Negative emotions words’ in this study refers to the words that the participants used to show their negative thought about the story that they had listened. Just like other categories, introvert participant in this study have higher frequency in the use of ‘negative emotions words’ compared to the extrovert participants. The words used are as illustrated in the table 3.

**Table 3: negative emotions words used by the participants.**

Extrovert
1. I am <b>not satisfied</b> ...
2. I am <b>strongly dislike</b> ...

3. ...it **does not have** proper ending.
4. ...he becoming a **beast or monster**...
5. ...my friends **do not** like the book **without** have...
6. ...it will **destroy** the quality...
7. ...**difficult** to understand.
8. ...the letters **spilled out** of the dictionary...

#### Introvert

1. ...**rather confusing** to me.
2. ...story was actually **pretty hard**.
3. I especially **didn't like** stories...
4. ...**unfortunately** it **ended** like that.
5. This story was also **not logic**.
6. ...story was **not clear** about the man...
7. I was **confused** to what...
8. ...actually is **wrong** with him.
9. Was he's **sick**? Was he's **crazy**...
10. ...story where **weird** stuff happen...
11. It was **not clear**...
12. I **can't** imagine things...
13. ...he **didn't** explain much...

The above table showed the types of 'negative emotions words' used by both participants. The participants used 'negative emotions words' to describe their feeling about the story, in this case what they dislike about it.

Based on the finding, it was clear that both participants dislike the story that they had listened to. However the way they both use different type of words to show the negative emotions. For the introvert participant, although she used higher frequency of 'negative emotions words' in her writing, it was not as strong as the words used by the extrovert participant. This is supported by Beukeboom et.al. (2012), saying that introvert language contain more exclusive words (e.g., but, Except), and negations ( e.g., no, not). Hence it showed that, the extrovert participant tend to use big words such as 'destroy' to express her negative emotion in her writing.

#### 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that introvert participant is very expressive compared to the extrovert participant. The text analysis showed that the introvert participant constantly have higher frequency in all of the categories of word choices involved in this study. This basically showed the natural characteristic of an introvert learner due to the fact she is comfortable expressing her personality traits in her writing. Not only that, this study also showed that, although the extrovert participant's writing was not as personal as her counterpart, the words used were still influenced by her personality traits. As a recommendation, the study focused only two fresh school leavers who just started their tertiary education. Thus, the writing outcome of the students are still at the beginner level of academic writing in tertiary level. Since there were only one students from each personality traits therefore; the findings of this study may not be generalized to all students at the tertiary level. Hence, further study need to be conducted using a bigger sample size and students from different level. Next, the current study was focusing on only one language skill which is writing. As for future research it is recommended to also explore on other language skills such as listening, speaking and reading. This is because each skill also has its own personality effect on it. For example their speech, daily conversation and others. Last but not least, the study only focused on three categories in analysing the written document. It was good that future researcher expand on the categories in analysing learners' written document. By doing so, it will help both teachers and learners to gain better understanding about their strength and weaknesses to improve their writing skill.

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