

# Notes on Samuel Johnson's Correspondence

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## Abstract

The present paper is concerned with the language of Samuel Johnson's correspondence: the philological aspects of his letters and consideration of his social network in terms of the number of letters sent and the form of their opening formula to his correspondents. The edition used for this study is *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, edited by Bruce Redford. The first letter is dated 30 October 1731, when Johnson was 21 years old. It ends on 10 December 1784, three days before his death. The period spans more than 50 years, and the total number of letters is 1,504. Whole letters in Bruce Redford's *Hyde Edition* were manually scanned and transferred to a machine-readable format for the present and future studies. A close look at the chronology of these whole letters reveals that the number of letters increased dramatically after 1750, especially after 1770, when Johnson turned 60 years old. As for his correspondents, John Taylor, Johnson's old friend, and Lucy Porter, his step-daughter, corresponded with Johnson for more than 40 years of his life. From 1760 onwards, Hester Thrale and James Boswell, who were a generation younger, not only joined his social network, but also became the No. 1 and No. 2 recipients of his correspondence. In 1780–84, when Johnson was in his seventies, he wrote more letters to Maria Thrale, Hester's daughter, and to John Perkins, a member of the Thrale family. Joshua Reynolds, who was involved in the creation of The Club, and his sister Frances, joined in. We found that the opening formula used by Johnson in his letters varied more than suggested by Baker (1980). Moreover, the more letters he sent to an addressee, the more informal the opening formula became. This indicates that the number of letters sent by Johnson corresponded to the closeness or intimacy he felt to the addressees.

## 0. Introduction

The present study is part of my wider project, which is to investigate the influence of the language of individuals on language change. To obtain some answers, the present paper concentrates on introducing the characteristics of the language and style of Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)'s correspondence. The reason is that Samuel Johnson was one of the most influential figures in both the literary and linguistic worlds in the 18th century; therefore, it would be safe to say that we cannot avoid him when we talk about 18th-century English language and literature. Why look at Johnson's personal letters and not his major works? It is true that, regarding his language and style and his relation to the English lan-

guage, most scholars' attention has been directed towards *A Dictionary of the English Language*, one of the greatest achievements in the history of English, or his Latin-based dictions in essays such as the *Rambler*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Idler*, the *Lives of Poets*, etc. in conventional Johnsonian studies. Consequently, based on such previous studies, an image of Johnson as a prescriptivist was established. However, little scholarly attention has been paid to his ordinary language use. In socio-historical linguistics, which has recently received much attention in the field of historical linguistics, personal correspondence is one of the most invaluable primary materials for providing researchers with reflections of the actual colloquial language of the time. It is generally recognised, for example, that '[P]ersonal letters are closer to spoken language than other written types of language' (Biber and Finegan, 1989: 116), and 'letters from past centuries provide genuine communication between individuals and show various communicative patterns through which the correspondents linguistically establish and express their relationships' (Palander-Collin, 2002: 132). Daghlia (1968: 109) stated that, for Johnson, correspondence was a necessary form of communication, but he wrote letters only when he had something to say. This means there is a great possibility that Johnson's letters not only offer a relatively direct view of his character, but also take us as close to his own spoken language and that of the period which we hope to obtain.

In this paper, first we will introduce the life of Samuel Johnson in section one. Then, the section two reviews the features of the edition of Johnson's collected letters used for this and further studies with the information about the number of letters, word counts, and the recipients of his letters. Finally, we will also look at Johnson's social network in terms of the recipients of his letters in sections three.

## 1. Brief life of Samuel Johnson

Johnson was born in September 1709 in Lichfield, England (near Birmingham), and died in December 1784 in London. He was the son of Michael Johnson, a bookseller in Lichfield. In 1728 he went to Pembroke College, Oxford, but a lack of money forced him to leave thirteen months later. Consequently, he made a living as a rural elementary school assistant teacher or by helping a publisher in Birmingham. He married Mrs Porter, an older widow in 1735 and opened a private school in Edial near Lichfield, though the number of his pupils was only three. He went to London with one of them, David Garrick.

While struggling with poverty, while contributing congressional articles to *Gentleman's Magazine*, he wrote poems: *London* (1738), *An Account of the Life of Savage* (1744), *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), and a tragedy *Irene* (1749).

He wrote the twice-weekly magazine the *Rambler* (1750–2), which was first published in 1750, almost by himself. His compilation of the *A Dictionary of the English Language* began in 1747, steadily progressing in the grief of losing his wife, and was finally completed in 1755. Initially, he sought the support of Lord Chesterfield, but it was in vain. Enduring poverty and scrofula, he finally accomplished this amazing challenge on his own.

He wrote to the *Idler* every week for 1758–60. He also wrote the *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), which was to pay for the funeral of his mother. Although he was imprisoned twice for debt, his fame grew gradually from the period on, and in 1762 he was given a £ 300 pension. In the following year Johnson met James Boswell, who wrote his biography. It is presumed that around the same period, the famous The Club was established at the centre of him, of which members include Edmund Burke, Joshua Reynolds, Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick, Edward Gibbon and others.

It was in 1764 that he became friends with Mrs. Thrale, her husband and other wealthy London merchants, after which he stayed in their mansion for a long time receiving hospitality. His introduction to the complete works of Shakespeare, published in 1765, is a masterpiece of Shakespeare's criticism. *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) and *A Diary of a Journey into North Wales, in the year 1774* (1816) are journals written when he travelled with Boswell in Scotland and with Mr. and Mrs. Thrale in Wales respectively. Describes a deep impression from nature, reminding him that he liked urban life had a feeling of something romantic. *The Lives of the Poets* (Volume 10, 1779–81) is one of his two major achievements, along with the *Dictionary*, which are the biography and prefaces to the selection of poems by 52 poets, as if to speak very freely. His greatness was in his anecdotes and humanity rather than in his writing. Although he is crude, prejudiced and unsophisticated, his heart is gentle and sympathetic, and merciful to the weak. He was also humorous, intelligent, and learned Striving to grasp the reality of his life with a sincere moral attitude that hates all falsehoods. Johnson is still admired as the ideal figure by the British people to this day.

## 2. Samuel Johnson's correspondence

### 2.1 Edition used and its editorial notes

Unfortunately, it is difficult to access and use the original manuscripts of Johnson's letters. Therefore, the present study is conducted on an edited and published version of his letters. The most recent scholarly edition of Samuel Johnson's correspondence is the one by Bruce Redford ed. (1992–4), on which the present study is based. Before the publication of the Redford's authoritative edition, several editions in the following list had been brought out, in which the years of publication, the titles and brief descriptions are presented (Redford ed. 1992: xxiii-xxiv):

- 1788 *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* By Hester Lynch Piozzi. Two volumes. London: 1788. (Three hundred thirty-eight letters to Hester Thrale and her family, with a few to other correspondents.)
- 1791 *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* By James Boswell. Two volumes. London: 1791. (Boswell published for the first time three hundred forty-four letters. In subsequent editions, Edmond Malone and J. W. Croker added significantly to this corpus.)
- 1892 *Letters of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* Edited by G. B. Hill. Two volumes. Oxford: 1892. (The first scholarly edition. Hill offers texts or partial texts for six hundred eighty-seven letters; he excludes "those of his [SJ's] letters which were included by Boswell in the *Life*" (Hill 1.ix).)
- 1929 *The R. B. Adam Library Relating to Dr. Samuel Johnson and His Era.* Four volumes. London and New York: 1929–30. (Volume I of Adam's catalogue includes two hundred twenty-four letters.)
- 1934 *The Queeney Letters.* Edited by the sixth Marquis of Lansdowne. One volume. London: 1934. (Lord Lansdowne includes thirty-two letters from Johnson to Hester Maria Thrale.)

- 1934 *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. Edited by G. B. Hill, revised by L. F. Powell. Six volumes. Oxford: 1934–64. (The definitive scholarly edition of Boswell's *Life*, with authoritative annotation of the letters.)
- 1952 *The Letters of Samuel Johnson, with Mrs. Thrale's Genuine Letters to Him*. Edited by R. W. Chapman. Three volumes. Oxford: 1952. (Chapman offers one thousand five hundred fifteen letters. "My edition is, in many respects, designed as a Supplement to Hill-Powell" (p. xvi).)

As to the choice and arrangement of letters, they are presented in chronological order, though letters written for others, as well as public dissertations in the guise of letters, have been excluded. The first letter dates on 30th October 1731 when he was twenty-one years old and ends on 10th December 1784, three days before his death. The period spans more than half a century and total number of letters amounts to 1504.

According to Redford, policies of annotation and transcription have been modelled on the style sheet for the *Yale Research Edition of the Private Papers of James Boswell*. In accordance with the policy mentioned, "manuscript documents in this edition have been printed to correspond to the originals as closely as is feasible in the medium of type, although the following editorial conventions are imposed (Redford ed. 1992: xix-xxi) :

*Addresses*. Elements appearing on separate lines in the MS are run together and punctuated according to modern practice. On franked covers, handwriting is that of the franker unless otherwise specified.

*Datelines*. Places and dates are joined at the head of the letter regardless of their position in the Ms. Punctuation has been normalized.

*Salutations*. Abbreviations are expanded. Commas and colons after salutations are retained; in the absence of punctuation, a colon is supplied.

*Complimentary closes*. Abbreviations are expanded. Punctuation has been normalized. Elements appearing on separate lines in the MS are run together. Complimentary closes paragraphed separately in the MS are printed as continuations of the last

line of text.

*Endorsements.* Handwriting is that of the recipient unless otherwise specified.

*Punctuation.* At the ends of completed sentences periods may replace commas or dashes and are always supplied when omitted. A sentence following a period always begins with a capital letter.

*Changes.* Substantive additions and deletions in Johnson's hand are recorded in the notes.

*Lacunae.* Words and letters missing through a tear or obscured by a blot are supplied within angle brackets. Inadvertent omissions are supplied within square brackets. Non- authorial deletions are not reported unless the reading is in doubt.

*Abbreviations, contractions, and symbols.* The following abbreviations, contractions, and symbols, and their variant forms, are expanded: abt (about), acct (account), agst (against), Bp (Bishop), cd (could), compts (compliments), Dr (Dear), Ld (Lord), Lop (Lordship), Ly (Lady), Lyship (Ladyship), recd (received), sd (should), Sr (Sir), wc (which), wd (would), y (your), & (and), &c (etc.). All retained abbreviations and contractions are followed by a period. Periods following ordinals have been removed.

*Brackets.* Parentheses replace square brackets in the text, brackets being reserved for editorial use.

*Spelling.* The original spelling has been retained, except for obvious inadvertencies, which are corrected in the text and recorded in the notes.

*Capitalization and paragraphing.* Original capitalization and paragraphing have been retained.

It would be beneficial to look at some of actual letters by Johnson. As is easily

expected, since the purposes or intentions, the addressees together with their social classes and the time of writing vary, the language and style of his letters are varied, too. Here are sample letters which would represent Johnson's formal and informal letters respectively:

Examples of formal letters:

(1) [To Lord Bute, Wednesday 3 November 1762]

My Lord: Temple Lane, November 3, 1762

That generosity by which I was recommended to the favour of his Majesty, will not be offended at a solicitation necessary to make that favour permanent and effectual.

The pension appointed to be paid me at Michaelmas I have not received, and know not where or from whom I am to ask it. I beg therefore that your Lordship will be pleased to supply Mr. Wedderburne with such directions as may be necessary, which I believe his friendship will make him think it no trouble to convey to me.

To interrupt your Lordship at a time like this with such petty difficulties is improper and unseasonable, but your knowledge of the world has long since taught you, that every man's affairs, however little, are important to himself. Every Man hopes that he shall escape neglect, and with reason may every man, whose vices do not preclude his claim, expect favour from that beneficence which has been extended to, My Lord, Your Lordship's most obliged and most humble Servant,

SAM. JOHNSON

(2) [To Lady Harrington, Wednesday 25 June 1777]

To the Right Hon. Lady H.

Madam: June 25, 1777

That Humanity which disposed Your Ladyship to engage me in Favour of Dr. Dodd, will incline You to forgive me when I take the Liberty of soliciting Your Influence in Support of my Endeavours, which, I am afraid, will otherwise be ineffectual. What could be done by the Powers which fall to my share, has been warmly and carefully performed. The Time is now come when high Rank and high Spirit must begin their Operations. Dodd must die at last unless Your Ladyship shall be pleased to represent to his Majesty how properly the Life of a Delinquent may be granted to the Petition of that Society for the Sake of which he is to be punished; that the greatest

Princes have thought it the highest Part of their Praise, to be easily flexible to the Side of Mercy; and that whether the Case be consider'd as political or moral, the joint Petition of Three and Twenty Thousand Supplicants, ought not to be rejected, when even after all that they desire is granted, the Offender is still to suffer perpetual Exile, perpetual Infamy, and perpetual Poverty.

I am, Madam, Your ladyship's Most obedient and most humble Servant,

SAM. JOHNSON

Examples of informal letters:

(3) [To James Boswell, Wednesday 14 March 1781]

Dear Sir,

March 14, 1781

I hoped you had got rid of all this hypocrisy of misery. What have you to do with Liberty and Necessity? Or what more than to hold your tongue about it? Do not doubt but I shall be most heartily glad to see you here again, for I love every part about you but your affectation of distress.

I have at last finished my Lives, and have laid up for you a load of copy, all out of order, so that it will amuse you a long time to set it right. Come to me, my dear Boszzy, and let us be as happy as we can. We will go again to the Mitre, and talk old times over. I am, dear Sir, Yours, affectionately,

SAM. JOHNSON

(4) [To Hester Thrale, Friday 9 April 1779]

Madam:

Friday, Apr. 9, 1779

An unexpected invitation will keep me here to Monday, but do, dear, sweet, fine, fair, kind, etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. send for me before sunrise on Monday. I have sent you the books. I am, Dearest Lady, Your most, and most etc.

SAM JOHNSON

Regarding Letters (1) and (2), the following characteristics could be pointed out: 1) Formal address terms and vocatives such as *My Lord*, *his Majesty*, *Your Lordship*, *Your Ladyship*; 2) Abstract nouns such as *generosity*, *humanity*, *friendship*, *knowledge*, etc. and vocabulary of Latin origin such as *solicitation*, *permanent*, *interrupt*, *improper*, *dispose*, *ineffectual*, etc.; 3) 'Detached' expressions such as "Every Man hopes that he shall escape

neglect, and with reason may every man, whose vices do not preclude his claim"; 4) Parallels: *warmly and carefully performed, high Rank and high Spirit, to suffer perpetual Exile, perpetual Infamy, and perpetual Poverty*, etc.; 5) Long subjects and consequent long sentences using relative pronouns, as in the first sentence of each letter. By these features, "respect" is shown by distancing a writer / speaker from the communication partner. This is a typical example of Negative politeness strategies<sup>1)</sup> from the perspective of recent Politeness Theory. In letters (3) and (4), on the other hand, although there are some rather formal expressions such as *hypocrisy of misery, Liberty and Necessity, your affection of distress, unexpected invitation at the level of words*, we feel as if we can hear Johnson's own voice, especially in (4). Furthermore, very informal expressions such as *Bozzy* in (3), and *dear, sweet, fine, fair, kind, etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. etc.* and *I am, Dearest Lady, Your most, and most etc.* in (4) reveal the intimacy between Johnson and the addressees: James Boswell and Mrs. Thrale.

## 2.2 The letter corpus

Whole letters in the Bruce Redford's *Hyde Edition* are manually scanned and formed into machine readable ASCII formats. The following table presents the number of Johnson's letters and their total word count for each decade since the 1730s, along with Johnson's age.

Table 1 Chronology of Samuel Johnson's letters

Year	1730s	1740s	1750-54	1755-59	1760-64	1765-9	1770-74	1775-79	1780-84	Total
S. J.'s age	22-30	31-40	41-5	46-50	51-5	55-60	61-5	66-70	71-5	
N. of letters	14	15	40	98	43	81	210	376	627	1,504
Wordcount	3,574	4,272	8,437	19,294	13,863	17,500	52,046	87,601	126,013	332,600

As you can see, the number of letters increases dramatically after 1750, especially after 1770 when Johnson turned 60 years old.

## 3. Correspondents of Johnson's letters

Since Redford's *Hyde edition* contains only out-letters from Johnson to his correspondents, it is suitable to investigate Johnson's language on the one hand, but without in-letters to him it might be difficult to reconstruct Johnson's social network completely on the other. However, considering the large number of Johnson's letters on his own, it could be partly

possible to reconstruct his network, at least his informal one. The table below is a list of top addressees of Johnson's letters to whom he sent more than 10 letters. This list could show a part of Johnson's social network:

The table below shows that the top three, Hester Thrale, James Boswell and John Taylor, account for about 40% of the total number of letters received. They are followed by Lucy Porter and John Nichols, who received around 50 letters, and Bennet Langton, Hester Maria Thrale, Frances Reynolds, William Strahan, Robert Chambers and Joshua Reynolds, who received about 30 letters, are in the third group<sup>2)</sup>.

Table 2 simply shows the ranking of the recipients of the approximately 1,500 letters Johnson wrote over a 53-year period. To see Johnson's social network in more detail, it is

**Table 2 Addressees of Samuel Johnson's letters (by number)**

Ranking	Names of addressees	N. of letters sent
1	Hester Thrale	373
2	James Boswell	100
3	John Taylor	98
4	Lucy Porter	60
5	John Nichols	46
6	Bennet Langton	33
7	Hester Maria Thrale	33
8	Frances Reynolds	32
9	William Strahan	30
10	Robert Chambers	27
11	Joshua Reynolds	25
12	Thomas Lawrence	22
13	John Perkins	22
14	Richard Brocklesby	20
15	Thomas Warton	19
16	William Bowles	18
17	Charles Burney	17
18	Edmund Hector	15
19	Elizabeth Aston	14
20	John Ryland	14
21	Henry Thrale	14
22	Lewis Paul	12
23	Edward Cave	11
24	John Hoole	11
25	Thomas Percy	11
26	George Strahan	11
27	Thomas Birch	10
Total		1,098

necessary to examine the recipients of the letters at ten-year intervals. Table 3 examines Johnson's age, number of letters, main recipients of letters and the number of letters received by each of them over the ten-year interval. From the table, we notice that the number of letters sent increases from the 1750s onwards when Johnson was in his 40s, and still increases dramatically towards the end of his life, with approximately 600 letters in each of the 1770s and in the five years from 1780 to 1784. Furthermore, as is expected, we find changes in the recipients of Johnson's letters in each of these periods, which indicate changes in his network. The names of top 11 recipients from all correspondents of Johnson's referred to in the previous paragraph are underlined.

The table reveals that in the first place John Taylor and Lucy Porter corresponded with Johnson for more than 40 years of his life. From 1760 onwards, in addition to the two mentioned above, Hester Thrale and James Boswell, who were a generation younger, joined the close social network. Furthermore, towards the end of his life in 1780–1784, when

**Table 3 Addressees of Samuel Johnson's letters (by year)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>1731–39</i>	<i>1740–49</i>	<i>1750–59</i>
<i>Johnson's age</i>	22–30	31–40	41–50
<i>Number of Letters</i>	15	15	138
<i>Names of Addressee</i>	Edward Cave (7)	Robert Dodsley (2) Theophilus Levett (2) Lewis Paul (2) <u>John Taylor</u> (2)	Thomas Warton (16) <u>Lucy Porter</u> (12) Lewis Paul (10) Samuel Richardson (9) cf. Sarah Johnson (4)
<i>Year</i>	<i>1760–69</i>	<i>1770–79</i>	<i>1780–84</i>
<i>Johnson's age</i>	51–59	60–69	70–75
<i>Number of Letters</i>	125	584	627
<i>Names of Addressee</i>	<u>Hester Thrale</u> (23) <u>Lucy Porter</u> (11) <u>John Taylor</u> (9) James Boswell (6) <u>Robert Chambers</u> (6)	<u>Hester Thrale</u> (212) James Boswell (69) <u>John Taylor</u> (41) <u>Lucy Porter</u> (13) <u>Bennet Langton</u> (12)	<u>Hester Thrale</u> (140) <u>John Taylor</u> (41) <u>Maria Thrale</u> (25) James Boswell (25) <u>John Nicols</u> (34) <u>Lucy Porter</u> (20) John Perkins (20) Richard Brockesby (20) <u>Joshua Reynolds</u> (18) William Bowles (18)

Johnson was in his seventies, he wrote more letters to Maria Thrale, Hester's daughter and to John Perkins, a member of the Thrale family. Then Joshua Reynolds, who was involved in the creation of The Club, and his sister Frances joined in Johnson's social network

In order to reconstruct Johnson's Social Network, it is possible not only to examine the number of letters and the background of each person during a certain period of time, but also to explore one approach from the form of the letters, specifically, what kind of opening and closing formulas Johnson used. In terms of Brown and Levison (1987)'s politeness theory, the longer concluding formula is felt to be more polite, i.e. more negatively polite, because it creates more distance between the writer and the addressee (Tieken-Boon van Oostade, 1999: 106). As referred to in 3.2.1, abbreviations used for part of the closing formula (e.g. *y* (> your), *&* (> and), *&c* (> etc.), etc.) are expanded in our letter corpus, so that it is hardly possible to measure the distance between Johnson and the addressees by way of the closing formula. Thus, we would like to look at variations of opening formula only in this section.

Baker (1980: 48) set up a hierarchically arranged set of opening formula from greatest formality to least as below:

- |                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Sir/Madam                         | 4. My dear Mother   |
| 2. Dear Sir/Dear Madam               | 5. Dear James/Jane  |
| 3. My dear Mr ___ /Mrs ___ /Miss ___ | 6. Dear Jemmy/Jenny |

As far as Johnson's letters are concerned, while the most popular opening formulae are *Sir/Madam* and *Dear Sir/Dear Madam*, we find a number of addressees of his letters who received various types of opening formula. The following Table 4 shows variations of the opening formula directed towards top fifteen correspondents.

We understand that the opening formula of Johnson's vary more than those suggested by Baker (1980). Johnson uses *Sir* or *Dear Sir* for male letter recipients with few variations. However, only for James Boswell and John Taylor, the informal formula "*My dear* + proper noun" is adopted. On the other hand, the opening formulae used in the letters to Hester Lynch Thrale, Hester Maia Thrale, Lucy Porter and Frances Reynolds are worth noticing. Johnson not only uses innumerable expressions in the letters to females but also they range from greatest to least formality, especially to Hester Maria Thrale, who is Hester Lynch Thrale's daughter, one of the youngest correspondents and, above all, Johnson's

**Table 4 Variations of the opening formula of Johnson's letters**

Ranking	Addressee	Expressions of Opening Formula
1	Hester Thrale	<i>Madam / Honoured Mistress / Dear Madam / Dearest Madam / Dear Lady / Dearest Lady / Dearest of all Dear Ladies / Dear dear Madam / My dearest Mistress My dear Lady.</i>
2	James Boswell	<i>Sir / Dear Sir / My dear Sir / My dear Boswell / (My dear Bossy).</i>
3	John Taylor	<i>Sir / Dear Sir / My dear Sir</i>
4	Lucy Porter	<i>Dear Madam / Dearest Madam / Dear miss / Dear Love / My Dear miss / My dearest / My Dear / My dearest Dear / My Dear Dear Love / My Love / My Dear Love</i>
5	John Nichols	<i>Sir / Dear Sir.</i>
6	Bennet Langton	<i>Sir / Dear Sir / Dearest Sir</i>
7	Hester Maria Thrale	<i>My sweet, dear, pretty, little Miss / Dear Love / Dear Sweeting / Dear Miss / My Dearest Love / Dear Madam / My dear Love / My Dear Charmer / Dearest Love / My dearest / Dearest Madam</i>
8	Frances Reynolds	<i>Dear Madam / My Dearest Dear / Dearest Madam / My Dear Dear My dearest Dear Madam</i>
9	William Strahan	<i>Sir / Dear Sir / Dearest Sir</i>
10	Robert Chambers	<i>Dear Sir</i>
11	Joshua Reynolds	<i>Sir / Dear Sir</i>
12	Thomas Lawrence	<i>Sir / Dear Sir</i>
13	John Perkins	<i>Dear Sir, Sir</i>
14	Richard Brocklesby	<i>Dear Sir</i>
15	Thomas Warton	<i>Sir / Dear Sir</i>

favourite.

The table clearly presents the more the number of letters increases, the more the informal types of opening formulas tend to increase, which means the number of letters that Johnson sent corresponds to his closeness or intimacy to the addressees of his letters.

In addition to the opening formulas listed in the list above, we find 'Honoured Madam' (to Sarah Johnson, Saturday 13 January 1759), 'Dear Honoured Mother' (as in the letters below) in the letters addressed to Sarah Johnson, Johnson's mother when her death was approaching. The following series of the letters to Sarah Johnson and Lucy Porter, Johnson's daughter in law who had been taking care of his mother, immediately before and after Sarah Johnson's death would be worth quoting before closing this section because they are not only representatives of Johnson's very informal letters but also disclose

Johnson's personal attributes at one of very emotional moments in life.

[To Lucy Porter, Tuesday 16 January 1759]

My Dear Miss:

Jan. 16, 1759

I think myself obliged to you beyond all expression of gratitude for your care of my dear Mother, God grant it may not be without success. Tell Kitty that I shall never forget her tenderness for her mistress. Whatever you can do, continue to do. My heart is very full.

I hope you received twelve guineas on Monday. I found a way of sending them by means of the post-master after I had written my letter, and hope they came safe. I will send you more in a few days.

God bless you all. I am, My dear, Your most obliged and most humble servant,

SAM. JOHNSON

Over the leaf is a letter to my Mother.

[To Sarah Johnson, Tuesday 16 January 1759]

Dear honoured Mother:

Jan. 16, 1759

Your weakness afflicts me beyond what I am willing to communicate to you. I do not think you ought to fear death, but I know not how to bear the thought of losing you. Endeavour to do all you [can] for yourself, eat as much as you can.

I pray often for you, do you pray for me. I have nothing to add to my last letter. I am, Dear dear Mother, your dutiful son,

SAM. JOHNSON

[To Sarah Johnson, Thursday 18 January 1759]

Dear honoured Mother,

Jan. 18, 1759

I fear you are too ill for long letters; therefore I will only tell you, you have from me all the regard that can possibly subsist in the heart. I pray God to bless you for evermore, for Jesus Christs sake. Amen.

Let Miss write to me every post, however short. I am, dear Mother, your dutiful Son,

SAM. JOHNSON

[To Lucy Porter, SATURDAY 20 JANUARY 1759]

Dear Miss:

Jan. 20, 1759

I will, if it be possible, come down to you. God grant I may yet [see] my dear mother breathing and sensible. Do not tell, lest I disappoint her. If I miss to write next post, I am on the road. I am, my dearest Miss, your most humble Servant,

SAM. JOHNSON

[To Sarah Johnson, Saturday 20 January 1759]

Dear honoured Mother,

Jan. 20, 1759

Neither your condition nor your character make it fit for me to say much. You have been the best mother, and I believe the best woman in the world. I thank you for your indulgence to me, and beg forgiveness of all that I have done ill, and all that I have omitted to do well. God grant you his Holy Spirit, and receive you to everlasting happiness, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Lord Jesus receive your spirit. Amen. I am, dear, dear Mother, your dutiful Son,

SAM. JOHNSON

[To Lucy Porter, Tuesday 23 January 1759]

Jan. 23, 1759

You will conceive my sorrow for the loss of my mother, of the best mother. If she were to live again, surely I should behave better to her. But she is happy, and what is past is nothing to her; and for me, since I cannot repair my faults to her, I hope repentance will efface them. I return you and all those that have been good to her my sincerest thanks, and pray God to repay you all with infinite advantage. Write to me, and comfort me, dear child. I shall be glad likewise, if Kitty will write to me. I shall send a bill of twenty pounds in a few days, which I thought to have brought to my mother; but God suffered it not. I have not power or composure to say much more. God bless you, and bless us all. I am, dear Miss, Your affectionate humble Servant,

SAM. JOHNSON

#### 4. Summary

This paper has dealt with the life of Samuel Johnson, the philological aspects of his letters,

and the considerations of Johnson's social network in terms of the number of letters sent and the forms of opening formula of them to his correspondents. The edition used for this study is *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, edited by Bruce Redford. The first letter dates on 30th October 1731 when Johnson was twenty-one years old and ends on 10th December 1784, three days before his death. The period spans more than half a century and total number of letters counts 1504. For the present study, whole letters in the Redford's *Hyde Edition* were manually scanned and formed into machine readable formats. A close look at chronology of his whole letters revealed that the number of letters increases dramatically after 1750, especially after 1770 when Johnson turned 60 years old. As to his correspondents, John Taylor, Johnson's old friend, and Lucy Porter, his step daughter, corresponded with Johnson for more than 40 years of his life. From 1760 onwards, Hester Thrale and James Boswell, who were a generation younger respectively, not only joined his social network but also became the No.1 and No. 2 recipients among the correspondents. Furthermore, towards the end of his life in 1780–1784, when Johnson was in his seventies, he wrote more letters to Maria Thrale, Hester's daughter and to John Perkins, a member of the Thrale family. Then Joshua Reynolds, who was involved in the creation of The Club, and his sister Frances joined in. Regarding the opening formula, we found that the opening formula that Johnson used in his letters vary more than those suggested by Baker (1980) and that the more the number of letters to an addressee increases, the more the informal types of opening formulas to her/him tend to increase, which means the number of letters that Johnson sent corresponds to his closeness or intimacy to the addresses of his letters.

### Notes

- 1) Negative politeness strategies are oriented towards the hearer's negative face and emphasize avoidance of imposition on the hearer. By attempting to avoid imposition from the speaker, the risk of face-threat to the hearer is reduced. For details, see Brown and Levinson (1987).
- 2) The following is brief introduction of 10 major correspondents who received letters from Samuel Johnson. The information on each correspondent is mainly based upon Rogers (1996).
  1. THRALE, Hester Lynch (originally Salushury; later Piozzi) (1741–1821). She was a friend and biographer of Johnson. She knew him in his later years more intimately than anyone else, and her *Anecdotes of Johnson* provide a close study of his private existence. She married the wealthy brewer Henry Thrale. Johnson's friendship with her is one of the most important relationships of his life, and equally she saw her connection with the great writer as a form of intellectual education. They met in 1765 and Johnson regularly visited the 'Thrales'

county house at Streatham, some ten miles south of central London. As well as the journey to North Wales, the Thrales took Johnson to Paris in 1775. She published three more major books after her works on Johnson: *Observations on her travels in Europe* (1789), *British Synonymy* (1794), and *Retrospection* (1801).

2. BOSWELL, James (1740–95).

As is well-known, he was a Samuel Johnson's greatest biographer. Boswell was born in Edinburgh as a member of the Scottish Lowland gentry and brought up in a strict Presbyterian environment. He studied law in Glasgow, and in London in 1763 he first met and subsequently befriended Samuel Johnson. From 1766 onwards he practised law in Edinburgh and wrote the *Account of Corsica* (1768), which made him a literary celebrity. He married in 1769 and started a family, but led a self-indulgent life of drinking and gambling. After his father's death, he became Lord of Auchinleck. In 1786 he emigrated to London, where he tried to make a success of his legal career, but was unsuccessful and disappointed. He devoted himself to writing Johnson's biography, which was published in 1791.

3. TAYLOR, John (1711–88).

He was a clergyman and son of an attorney. He was educated at Lichfield Grammar School along with Johnson and remained one of his closest lifelong friends. He passed on to Oxford in few months after Johnson, but entered a different college, Christ Church. Taylor was intended for the bar, and did initially practice as a lawyer, but he decided to enter the church. Johnson regularly stayed with him at Ashbourne, and it was Johnson who wrote the sermons which were published under Taylor's name in 1788–89.

4. PORTER, Lucy (1715–86).

She was a daughter of Samuel Johnson's wife Elizabeth Johnson by her first husband Harry Porter. Alone of the Porter children, she accepted Johnson as her step-father, and maintained good relations with him for the rest of his life. Their correspondence formed one of the most important links between London and Lichfield for Johnson. She also gave James Boswell important insights into the marriage, and into Johnson's early life, derived from Lucy's long association with Sarah Johnson, Samuel's mother, whom she helped in the running of the family bookshop. She lived with her mother until 'Tetty (Elizabeth)' followed Johnson to London. When he returned to Lichfield in the last twenty years of his life, Johnson regularly visited Lucy, and treated her with tender respect.

5. NICHOLS, John (1745–1826).

He was a printer, editor and writer. As editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, he carried on the work of Edward Cave, and published important material on Johnson in its pages. At the end of Johnson's life, Nichols had extensive dealings with him. He printed and helped to revise the *Lives of the Poets*, and as a member of the Essex Head Club, he had regular social contacts.

6. LANGTON, Bennet (1737–1801).

He was a member of an old Lincolnshire family. He entered Trinity College, Oxford, 1757, studying under Thomas Warton. He was active in the militia for twenty-five years. Johnson visited him at Warley Camp in Essex in 1778. One of the founding members of the Club in 1764. Langton attended regularly until shortly before his own death. Johnson admired Langton's piety, his Classical learning and his relish for life. When Johnson himself approached death, Langton tended him with care, and then undertook the task of editing his Latin poems, which appeared in 1787.

7. THRALE, Hester Maria ('Queeney') (1764–1857).

She was an eldest daughter of Hester Lynch Thrale and a favourite of Johnson, who named the young girl 'Queen Hester', later abbreviated to Queeney. Her mother's early pride in her gave

way over time to exasperation and dismay, as Queeney's reserved and highly controlled personality clashed with more demonstrative nature of her mother. After her mother's marriage to Gabriel Piozzi, it was Queeney as much as anyone who led opposition to the union. Hester Maria was perhaps the last person who had come into close contact with Johnson to quit the stage, over seventy years after his death.

8. REYNOLDS, Frances (1729–1807).

He was an artist, sister of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Born in Devon, she joined Joshua as his housekeeper at Great Newport Street, London in 1753. Their relations were sometimes strained, and she left to return to Devon in the late 1770s. In the family it was believed that she could have married Johnson if she had chosen, and it is certainly true that Johnson intervened at times in her disputes with her brother.

9. STRAHAN, William (1715–85).

He was a printer and publisher. Born Edinburgh, he was educated at Edinburgh High School, became journeyman printer. He moved to London c. 1738, and established printing business there. He worked with leading booksellers including Thomas Longman, Robert Dodsley and Andrew Millar. Friend of David Hume, some of whose works he printed. He was the printer of Johnson's *Dictionary*, and acted as paymaster for the venture. In effect he was the intermediary between Johnson and the group of booksellers sponsoring the publication of the *Dictionary*. As a result of the relations built up in this undertaking, Strahan began to act unofficially as Johnson's banker, a position he retained in subsequent years. He was printer and publisher of Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*.

10. CHAMBERS, Sir Robert (1737–1803).

He was a jurist and later Indian Judge. He was Educated at Lincoln College, Oxford and succeeded Sir William Blackstone as the second Vinerian professor of English law at Oxford, 1766. Chambers became a member of the Club in 1768, no doubt owing to the special friendship which Johnson had with him. They were known to each other at least as early as 1754, when Chambers was still an undergraduate. Their closest relationship came after Chambers was appointed to the chair, as Johnson gave him extensive help in preparing his lectures between 1766 and 1770.

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