A Preliminary Corpus Study on EFL Test Takers’ Writing Proficiency

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the written language produced by EFL learners in a test situation. One hundred fifty-four of the examinees who took the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT, a five-level criterion-referenced testing system) Intermediate Level Writing Test in 2002 were randomly selected as the subjects of the study. Among them, 73 passed the test, while the remaining 81 did not.

The corpus tool WordSmith 3 was used to analyze the English words produced by these two groups of test takers. The most frequently used topic-related content words were identified and misuses of some of them thereafter examined. The correct use of each of those words was also verified using a native English corpus. An analysis of how these words were misused by both groups was conducted, and comparisons were made between their use by the two groups and between their use by both groups and by native English speakers. Noteworthy findings are reported here, and suggestions based on them are made for the teaching and learning of English.