Subsumable Relationship among Error Types of EFL Writers—A Learner Corpus-Based Study of Expository Writing at the GEPT Intermediate Level

Abstract

To promote positive washback, the LTTC provides much support for teaching and learning, including print books, online and face-to-face blended learning platforms, and tagged computer-readable GEPT Learner Corpora. This study used one of the corpora, the GEPT Intermediate level writing corpus, to investigate critical features of expository writing by Taiwanese EFL learners. Since assessment is an integral part of the learning and teaching cycle, this study attempts to help teachers gather valuable information about students that informs and influences how they teach; moreover, it aims to help students gauge their own progress, set priorities, and focus on their learning.

In this study, the Error Analysis paradigm was applied to examine 360 writing samples from the corpus: 115 with a score of five, 125 with a score of four, and 120 with a score of three. Passing grades are four and above. The analysis of the writing samples yielded a code list of 41 codes in four categories. Of these codes, 18 are error types related to within-sentence grammaticality, 10 are related to word choice, 8 are related to text coherence, cohesion and unity, and the other 5 are features of rhetorical structure of expository writing. All errors and features were counted. The results yielded 2,734 error counts related to within-sentence grammaticality, 1,837 error counts related to word choice, 354 error counts related to text coherence, cohesion and unity, and 468 feature counts related to rhetorical structure. There was an inverse correlation between the writing score and error count. ANOVA was conducted to verify between group differences. A comparison of frequency counts of prevalent error types across groups revealed a subsumable relationship between error types of the three groups. The subset of error types of writing samples that were rated 5 comes in the center subsumed by the subset of error types of writing samples rated 4, which in turn is subsumed by the subset of error types of writing samples rated 3. Such a relationship suggests that some types of errors are more persistent in the process of learning EFL writing and that other types of errors are easier to eradicate. As for features of rhetorical structure, the higher score the group has, the more features are exhibited. The writing samples rated 3 indicate that the writers did not handle topic sentences and concluding sentences well, the latter in particular. The results of the study suggest some pedagogical implications for EFL writing teaching and learning.

Keywords: EFL writing, Error Analysis, quantitative text analysis, expository writing, contrastive rhetoric