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Error Analysis on English Writing of Chinese Mongolian Students Based on Automated Scoring System

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Abstract

A Corpus plays an important role in English writing. Corpus can provide students with rich authentic materials. The automated scoring system which is set up based on the use of corpus, such as the automated scoring system of Ju Ku, can grade the composition and make an analysis of students’ English writing to help them correct their writing errors. In this paper, an investigation of the writing problems of Mongolian students is carried out to make an analysis of the errors that students are easy to make in an attempt to improve Mongolian students’ writing abilities.

Key words: Error analysis; Automated scoring system; Chinglish

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INTRODUCTION

Corpus refers to a large collection of well-sampled and processed electronic texts, on which language studies, theoretical or applied, can be conducted with the aid of computer tools. Corpus linguistics is a cross-century and new-emerging interdisciplinary discipline. It has been developing rapidly in foreign countries. According to the incomplete statistics of the linguists J. Edwards in the university of California, since the 1980s, twenty-

four English corpora have been built and put into use. Among them, British National Corpus, American English BROWN Corpus, FLOB Corpus are the most common. In China, the study of English corpus was made by Professor Renjie Huang and Huizhong Yang in 1982. They established “English corpus for Special Use”. The most Commonly used domestic “English Corpus “are “Chinese Learner English Corpus” and “Spoken and Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners” and all sorts of Corpus based automated scoring systems. The appearance of corpus not only marks the technological progress of the means of linguistics research, but also marks a major change in language research, it represents a new linguistic thinking and a new business (Li, 1999). The use of corpus can promote students’ autonomous learning. It provides technology and data to evaluate objectively the compositions of students and it records the management of the whole dynamic process. This paper mainly focuses on an error analysis on Mongolian students’ writing samples by using the resources in corpus. A description of the basic problems of Mongolian students’ writing is followed. Definitions of error analysis and contrastive analysis are introduced in later sections. After a brief introduction of the Automated Essay Scoring and Juku Automated Essay Scoring in particular, an investigation is carried out to analyze the errors that students are easy to make. The primary purpose is to enhance Mongolian students’ writing abilities by means of error analysis.

1. THE PRESENT SITUATION OF CHINESE MONGOLIAN STUDENTS’ WRITING PROFICIENCY

1.1 College English Teaching Requirements for Students’ English Writing Ability

Writing is one of the four important language skills for language learners in second language acquisition. It has

been regarded as one of the teaching goals in English language teaching for English learners. However, the results of many studies and writing tests reveal that most of the Chinese students have poor ability in writing. The following document is following document is the requirements for students' English writing ability.

1.1.1 Basic Requirements

Students should be able to complete writing tasks for general purposes, e.g., describing personal experiences, impressions, feelings, or some events, and to undertake practical writing. They should be able to write within 30 minutes a short composition of no less than 120 words on a general topic, or an outline. The composition should be basically complete in content, clear in the main idea, appropriate in diction and coherent in discourse. Students are expected to be able to have a command of basic writing strategies.

1.1.2 Intermediate Requirements

Students should be able to express, by and large, personal views on general topics, compose English abstracts for thesis in their own specialization, and write short English papers on topics in their field. They should be able to describe charts and graphs, and to complete within 30 minutes a short composition of no less than 160 words. The composition should be complete in content, clear in the idea, well-organized in presentation and coherent in discourse.

1.1.3 Advanced Requirements

Students should be able to write brief reports and papers in their areas of specialty, to express their opinions freely, and to write within 30 minutes expository or argumentative essays of no less than 200 words on a given topic. The text should be characterized by clear expression of ideas, rich content, neat structure, and good logic.

1.2 The Common Problems of Mongolian Students' English Writing

English writing has been an emphasis and difficulty of the second language acquisition for language learners. Many students, especially the Mongolian students, have difficulties in English writing. Most of the Mongolian students' English is poor because they have learned little English before they go to the university. Due to lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and the influence of the negative transfer of their native language, Mongolian students encounter many problems in their writing. They sometimes are confused of the differences between Chinese and western cultures as well. There are some problems in students' linguistic competence in addition to their lack of knowledge in writing techniques (Du, 2001).

It is a fact that even if they have acquired a certain amount of vocabulary and have learned much about English grammar, they are still poor at writing. They can not transfer what they have learned to the target language, thus failing to express their ideas freely. In addition, they are not

very good at organizing a discourse. Some writings are just piles of words or expressions, which do not make any sense to the reader. Another weakness of their writing is that it lacks unity and coherence. At times it is difficult to find a topic sentence in their composition. Even though a topic sentence does exist in their composition, the supporting details branch off from it in the course of writing.

Writing is a reflection of thinking. The negative transfer of mother language will affect a student's thinking. Affected by different modes of thinking between Chinese and English, students often make sentences Chinglish alike. Chinglish, of course, is that misshapen, hybrid language that is neither English nor Chinese but might be described as "English with Chinese characteristics."

2. AUTOMATED ESSAY SCORING (AES)

2.1 The Development of AES

Automated essay scoring (AES), which is also named as computerized essay scoring, computer essay grading, computer-assisted writing assessment, or machine scoring of essays (Shermis & Burstein, 2003), is a tool to assess and score written essays. With significant promotion in computer technology, AES has been acquainted in various fields such as teaching pedagogy, cognitive science and educational measurement, which result in implementation of on-line systems. These systems have now become a vital supplement for assessment contexts. Computer automated scoring system, based on educational technology, automatically provides assessment and feedback to students' compositions. Such way of assessing compositions or essays has become the direction and trend of future feedback researches. The thesis takes Juku, the automated scoring system used in Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities, as an example to discuss the feedback of automated scoring system on students' College English writing.

2.2 Juku Automated Essay Scoring

Juku Automated Essay Scoring is developed by current artificial intelligence technology based on corpus and the cloud computing technology. It is an online system which serves as an assistant to help teachers correct English compositions of second language learners. Teachers benefit a lot from it because it can effectively reduce the workload of the teacher. It is one of the largest corpora in English writing, and it has many advantages.

Many colleges and universities are using Juku Automated Essay Scoring in English teaching. It is easy for students to use it online to finish their compositions and after submission, students may get the results and comments by checking the essay scoring system. Students can get satisfactory scores by revising their compositions repeatedly according to the comments and then resubmitting them. Teachers and students carry out

writing activities by registering in the system. The teacher makes requirements for a composition online and students fulfill the assignments and submit their work. Students may get immediate grades and the detailed comments are very useful to them. It is a good way to improve students' English writing ability.

3. METHOD AND INSTRUMENTS

Just as the famous linguist Carl James states "There are thus three branches of two-valued (2 languages are involved) interlingual linguistics: Translation theory-which is concerned with processes of text convention; error analysis; and contrastive analysis-these last two having as the object of enquiry the means whereby a monolingual learns to be bilingual."

3.1 Error Analysis

According to studies done on Error Analysis (Corder, 1974), error are unavoidable and the making of errors should be regarded as a device the learner uses to learn the target language. As a result, three ways of error identification or interpretation have been adopted: plausible interpretation, which studies the learner's interlanguage by taking both the rules of the target language and the situation of a produced utterance, known as acceptability and appropriateness, as a criterion, authoritative interpretation, emphasizing more on acceptability rather than appropriateness (Corder, 1987).

In second language acquisition, error analysis studies the types and causes of language errors. Errors are classified according to:

- Modality (i.e., level of proficiency in speaking, writing, reading, listening)
- Linguistic levels (i.e., pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, style)
- Form (e.g., omission, insertion, substitution)
- Type (systematic errors/errors in competence vs. occasional errors/errors in performance)
- Cause (e.g., interference, interlanguage)
- Norm vs. system

Error analysis in SLA was established in the 1960s by Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues. Error analysis (EA) was an alternative to contrastive analysis, an approach influenced by behaviorism through which applied linguists sought to use the formal distinctions between the learners' first and second languages to predict errors. Error analysis showed that contrastive analysis was unable to predict a great majority of errors, although its more valuable aspects have been incorporated into the study of language transfer. A key finding of error analysis has been that many learner errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language.

3.2 Contrastive Analysis

From the 1950s to the 1960s, in order to identify the areas of difficulties encountered by the L2 learners, Contrastive

Analysis was developed, by which two languages are systematically compared. The origin of this approach can be traced back to the American structuralists who advocated the belief that the basic problems in L2 learning do not result from any essential difficulty in the new language features but primarily from learners' L1 habits (Lado, 1957). Therefore, researchers at that time were motivated by the prospect of being able to identify points of similarity and difference between NL and TL. CA is based on the following assumptions:

- a) The only obstacle to learning a new language is the interference of NL.
- b) Differences between NL and TL can be found by analyzing the structures of the NL and TL.
- c) The differences can help to predict the difficulties in SLA.

3.3 Research Procedure

According to the data that the automated scoring system provides, the teacher takes advantage of the methods of contrastive analysis and error analysis to analyze the way that students employ grammar, words, collocation and syntax in their composition and probe into the manner that students organize their discourse. Based on the relative principles and theories of linguistics, the teacher makes an analysis of the common problems that students encounter and errors in students' writing in order to summarize the rules students use in writing a composition. The subjects for this study were students major in clinical medicine in Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities. The students were required to write several compositions of no less than 80 words. The purpose of the study is to investigate the students' linguistic performance in a writing task. 60 samples were randomly drawn to be assessed by Juku grading system. During the research, the participants were not informed of the experiment, the teaching procedures were conducted under the natural circumstances, and the experiment was fulfilled in a way the students thought that they were just taking part in a writing practice. Therefore, there is no need to doubt about the validity of the experiment. The data were provided by Juku grading system and the analysis was made afterwards.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to marks graded by Juku automated grading system, the student's highest score is 83.5, the lowest score is 18.4, and the average score is 63.4 points. There are altogether 384 mistakes in students' compositions. Among them, the most common mistakes are lexical errors and syntactical errors and Chinglish in their writing.

4.1 Examples of Chinglish

- a) We must make an improvement in our work. (unnecessary verb)

Here the verb (“make”) is a weak, colorless, all-purpose word having no very specific meaning of its own, while the real action is expressed in the noun “improvement”. Since the verb is not contributing anything to the sense, it can be edited out: “We must improve our work.”

- b) Incorrect: They didn’t understand my mind.
Correct: They didn’t understand what I was thinking.
- c) Incorrect: What is your job?
Correct: What do you do?
- d) Incorrect: He becomes better.
Correct: He got better.
- e) Incorrect: Is this seat empty?
Correct: Is this seat taken?

f) Even though the computer can do a lot of things for us, however, it can’t completely take the place of people.

The phrase “even though “and “ however” can not be used simultaneously in one sentence. The word “however” can be omitted.

4.2 Examples of the Misuse of Collocation

a) Incorrect: My brother has been busy in preparing for his final examination.

Correct: My brother has been busy preparing for his final examination.

b) Incorrect: Laura has spent half a day to revise her lessons.

Correct: Laura has spent a half day revising her lessons.

- c) Incorrect: I have a lot of work to be done.
Correct: I have a lot of work to do.

d) Incorrect: After dinner, my mother suggested to go for a walk.

Correct: After dinner, my mother suggested going for a walk.

- e) Incorrect: We can surf on the internet.
Correct: We can surf the internet.

f) Incorrect: But long time sees mobile phone will hurt the eyes, also to have harm to the skin.

Correct: But if you use mobile phone for a long time, it will hurt your eyes and also do harm to your skin.

- g) Incorrect :Do you agree my opinion?
Correct: Do you agree with my opinion?

4.3 Examples of Misuse of Adverb

- a) Incorrect: He treated me very friendly.
Correct: He treated me in a friendly way.

4.4 Examples of Subject-Verb Agreement

- a) Incorrect: There are the advantage of the Internet.
Correct: There are the advantages of the Internet.
- b) Incorrect: There are a lot of game on the computer.
Correct: There are a lot of games on the computer.

4.5 Errors in Grammar

- a) Incorrect :The Internet is bad is also good.
Correct: The Internet has both advantages and disadvantages.

- b) Incorrect: They aren’t study hard .
Correct: They don’t study hard.

4.6 Lexical Errors

- a) Incorrect: I should better use it.
Correct: I had better use it.

b) Incorrect: It draws the world closer and makes lifes faster.

Correct: It draws the world closer and makes life easier.

c) Incorrect: Such as: check information, download, online shopping.

Correct: For example, check information, download, online shopping.

4.7 The Problem of Punctuation

Influenced by Chinese, some students use too often the punctuation such as a comma, a period, and a semicolon. Some students use Chinese punctuation marks in English, for example, a period in Chinese and quotation marks which do not exist in English. They sometimes confuse these punctuation marks. Some of them can not use appropriately the punctuation marks.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, an analysis of the errors in Mongolian students’ writing is made. Students are poor at making proper use of words, grammar and collocation. Quite often students’ written English is influenced by Chinese language. This not only reveals that students don’t have a good command of English, but also suggests that students write a composition in a Chinese thinking way. As for the Mongolian students, English is one other language in addition to Chinese and their mother tongue. Mongolian students should avoid the bad interference of both Chinese and their mother tongue to foreign language acquisition. It is of vital importance to improve students’ writing ability in spite of the cultural differences between English and Chinese. In addition, it is a topic that needs to be further discussed to make use of the positive transfer of the mother tongue to English writing.

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