



Improving College Student’s English Competence by the Application of CLEC Corpus

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Abstract

It is known to us that writing, a fundamental part of language learning skills, is a crucial part in language output. This paper, based on Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC), aims to discuss the effect of application of corpus to China’s English writing education. Moreover, by using some real teaching examples, the present study is intended to illustrate the advantages of corpus as a strategy to improve English as foreign language learning in China.

Key words: CLEC; Corpus; Non-English major postgraduates

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of globalization and education internationalization, China has realized the significance of improving students’ English competence for future development. However, students’ English competence still can not meet the need of China’s modern society. According to Global Talent 2021, four

skills will be in the greatest demand in the next ten years including: digital skills, agile thinking, interpersonal and communication skills, global operating skills. All these four skills need an acquisition of language proficiency. This paper is intended to discuss the collocation errors in CLEC corpus for improving non-English major students’ writing proficiency.

1. THE BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 CLEC

Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC) is constructed by Gui Shichun from Guangdong Foreign Studies University together with Yang Huizhong from Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 2003. CLEC is the first English learners written corpus, containing 1, 070,602 tokens (Gui & Yang, 2003, p.3) of English compositions sampled from Chinese learners of English with different levels of proficiency. There are five different stages of learners covering from senior high school to college students in CLEC. These five sub-corpora are tagged from ST2 to ST6 in CLEC as following: senior high school students (ST2); non-English major freshmen and Sophomores (ST3); non-English major juniors and seniors (ST4); English major freshmen and sophomores (ST5) and English major juniors and seniors (ST6). The essays in these five sub-corpora written by Chinese students are covering a variety of topics such as: Getting to know the outside world, waste, health, environment protection, study, my view on job-hopping, and my view on fake commodities etc..

1.2 Research Instrument

The software used in this paper is AntConc developed by professor Laurence Anthony who is the Professor in the Faculty of Science and Engineering at Waseda University Japan. There are versions available for Windows, Mac &

Linux and this software is user friendly. With the help of the software AntConc, a lot of errors are retrieved from CLEC corpus as resources for identifying and discovering characteristics of interlanguage written by Chinese learners.

2. MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Writing is usually used as an important means of

measurement to examine the student's English proficiency in CET4 and CET6 tests. Collocation, co-occurrence of the words with a certain word, has been regarded as a crucial skill in writing and a very important factor for the accurate and native-like writing. There are six types of collocation errors in CLEC tagged from cc1 to cc6. The detailed introduction of these six types of collocation errors can be showed in the following Table 1 with the real examples retrieved from CLEC.

Table 1
Six Types of Collocation Errors in CLEC

Type	Title	Example
cc1	improper noun/noun collocation	reason is that science [cc1,-1] technology is developing ver
cc2	improper noun/verb collocation	many changes happened [cc2,1-] in developing country [np6]
cc3	improper verb/noun collocation	I have taken many degrees [cc3,2-] about how to be a professional tour-guide
cc4	Improper adjective/noun collocation	make more vast improvement [cc4,1-] in our health.
cc5	improper verb/adverb collocation	you maybe can't repair [cc5,-2] it better. But, you repair
cc6	improper adverb/adjective collocation	These examples are very [cc6,-1] many. So, we should wo

A close examination of the data of Chinese English learner's six subcategories collocation errors in four types of college students in China can be illustrated in the following Table 2:

Table 2
Data of Descriptive Classification of Collocation Errors in CLEC

Error type	cc1	cc2	cc3	cc4	cc5	cc6
ST3	76	207	598	114	47	14
ST4	95	60	505	163	36	8
ST5	28	8	90	50	6	3
ST6	69	26	160	61	8	2

In order to show the tendency of these data in a vivid way, the following Figure 1 can be used.

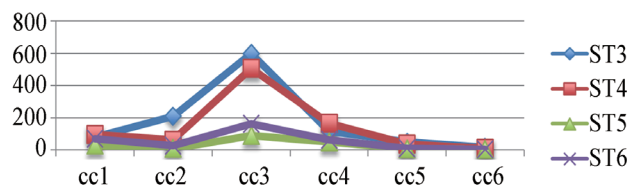


Figure 1
Tendency of College Learners' Collocation Errors in CLEC

As can be seen from Figure 1, in all the subcategories of learners' collocation errors, the improper choice of verb/noun collocation error (cc3) occurs most frequently. The detailed tendency of cc3 used by Chinese college learners among these four types of Chinese college

students can be showed in the following Figure 2.

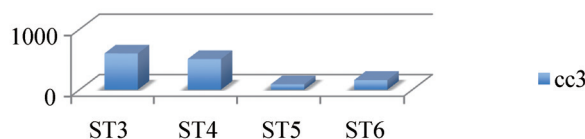


Figure 2
Tendency of cc3 by College Learners' in CLEC

From those collocation errors collected by CLEC, which are remarkable part and valuable resources for the present research, we can know that collocation errors are commonly occurred in compositions of Chinese students especially in cc3. Without the mastering of collocation, the English language learning is lack of a solid foundation and the English proficiency of students can not be improved remarkably. It's important for teachers to identify the current language level of English language learners when teaching English as a foreign language. Making clear of the accurate language proficiency level will enable teachers to provide appropriate scaffolding and instructional support for students at various proficiency levels during whole and small group instruction. In addition, teachers should bear in mind that the four language skills are closely related to each other and everyone skill is expected to response to the other one in considering to improve English language proficiency of students. English language learners at each proficiency level require instruction that is targeted to their particular language level in order to promote optimal foreign language development.

CONCLUSION

With the increasing globalization and the interdependence among countries, intercultural communication is getting ever more frequent. English, as the world's most important international language, is playing a key role in business, education, communication etc.. The research about improved methods of computer-aided, corpus-based method to extract significant collocations from authentic language data to develop college students' English proficiency has become of great importance. Accompanied by some examples retrieved from CLEC, the present study reflects the real current condition of students language expression. Collocation is a kind of lexical chunk can be regarded as a kind of formulaic sequence. Collocation can help students get across "the intermediate plateau" and makes communication faster, more efficient, and easier for mutual comprehension. Students can reach higher level of proficiency by gaining awareness of the characteristics of language variety and grasping the various meanings of the same word in different context. Teachers can provide more scientific, objective and authentic language material,

and give awareness of cultural background information. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage the application of corpus in basic language teaching.

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