

Individual Paper Session 17
Lexicon/Vocabulary
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A Corpus-Based Analysis of Frequency Adverbs Used by Chinese English Majors

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This study attempted to investigate how Chinese college English majors use frequency adverbs in their written and spoken English in order to provide empirical evidence for answering two questions: (1) whether English learners tend to overuse or/and underuse high-frequency words; (2) whether they tend to use oral discourse features in their written English or/and use written discourse features in their spoken English.

The data used in this study included a written English corpus by English majors from the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC) (Gui & Yang, 2003), and a spoken English corpus from the Spoken English Corpus of Chinese Learners (SECCL), which is being constructed by Nanjing University. With these two corpora combined, the general learner English corpus contained 955,043 words.

The reference corpus in this study was the British National Corpus (BNC), which contains 90 million words of written English and 10 million words of spoken English, all by native speakers. Data analysis included a series of comparisons regarding the use of top twenty frequency adverbs (TTFAs), such as the comparison between the general learner corpus and the BNC, the comparison between the learners' spoken corpus and the spoken portion of the BNC, the comparison between the learners' written corpus and the written portion of the BNC.

The study found that the overuse tendency and the underuse tendency co-existed in the use of frequency adverbs by Chinese EFL learners but the former was much stronger than the latter both in their speech and writing. Furthermore, the use of frequency adverbs in speech by Chinese EFL learners deviates more than that in writing from native speakers' use. It also showed that some written-register sensitive frequency adverbs were overused in the learner's spoken corpus while some spoken-register sensitive frequency adverbs were overused in the learner's written corpus.