Linguistic Features and Writing Quality of Essays
by Japanese EFL College Students

Masumi Narita and Masatoshi Sugiura

Abstract

The relationship between linguistic features and L2 writing quality was investigated using frequency counts of selected features in EFL essay data. A learner corpus was constructed by collecting essays produced within a 40-minute time limit by 61 Japanese EFL college students. After the essays had been scored by two raters, the student participants were grouped into four L2 writing-skill levels. A computer-based quantitative approach was used to carry out correlation analyses of the usage frequency or ratio of 11 linguistic features with L2 writing quality, as represented by the essay ratings. Group differences were also analyzed using pairwise comparisons where statistical multiple comparison methods proved to be applicable. The results showed that text length, average sentence length, and the Guiraud index (as a lexical diversity measure) were positively and moderately correlated with essay ratings, whereas weak to moderate negative correlations were found for lexical density and the occurrence of sentence fragments. In addition, pairwise multiple comparisons showed significant group differences as well as similarities in the use of linguistic features. The most unexpected but striking finding was that beginning-level L2 writers showed a tendency to make heavy and often incorrect use of both subordinators and logical connectors.