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EFL Learners'Lexical Competence in Narrative and Argumentative Writing: A Coh-Metrix-based Study

Concerned with the lexical properties of EFL learners'writing, this study investigated the extent to which EFL learners differ in their abilities to use English vocabulary in writing two different genres. For this study, a corpus of 100 essays (50 narrative and 50 argumentative) written by high intermediate EFL learners were examined against nine lexical indices reported by the computational tool Coh-Metrix. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the lexical indices related to breadth of lexical knowledge (word frequency and lexical diversity), depth of lexical knowledge (hypernymy, polysemy, semantic co-referentiality, word meaningfulness), and accessibility of lexical items (word concreteness, familiarity, and imageability). Results showed significant differences between two genres in terms of word frequency, lexical diversity, word concreteness, word familiarity, and word imageability. A discriminant function analysis further revealed that lexical diversity and word imageability contributed most significantly to differentiating the genres. These results provided evidence for the presence of genre effects on learners'use of vocabulary in writing in different genres, thus stressing the need to incorporate genre differences in evaluating the lexical quality of learner texts. Pedagogically-wise, the study advances EFL practitioners'understanding of learners'lexical competence in genre-specific writing, and as far as writing assessment is concerned, it warrants critical consideration for existing measures that largely exclude lexical aspects other than frequency and diversity.

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