A CONSIDERATION OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ENGLISH OF NATIVE SPEAKERS AND JAPANESE LEARNERS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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Abstract

It is often said that speeches and writings vary greatly with regard to vocabulary and grammar. However, how these differences can be seen in language use by English native speakers and non-native speakers has not been wholly elucidated. The current study, using the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE), quantitatively compares topic-controlled speeches and writings by native speakers and Japanese learners of English. Our learner-corpus-based analyses revealed that the difference is not as substantial as widely believed for native speakers in terms of highly frequent words, frequency of eleven textual indices, statistical positioning of individual samples, clustering structure of the indices, and the relationship between the production mode and the indices.

Key words

speeches, writings, grammar, vocabulary, production modes, learner corpus

1 Introduction

Halliday (1985) suggests that speeches and writing are “not just alternative ways of doing the same things; rather, they are ways of doing different things” (ibid.: vii). It is widely believed that speeches and writings differ, but to which extent and in which ways have not necessarily been clarified. This is largely due to the fact that English studies have traditionally paid attention to the written mode. Halliday also insists that conventional grammar studies have been about “a grammar of written language” as something that exists. They do not appropriately outline a grammar of spoken language as something that happens or as a flow of conscious experience (Chafe 1994). Thus, as Carter and McCarthy (2006) state, most grammar books published to date “have had a bias towards the written language” and “the spoken language has been downgraded and has come to be regarded as relatively inferior to written manifestations” (ibid.: 9).

However, as mentioned by McEnery and Hardie (2012: 84-85), more and more linguists have come to be interested in the possibility that speeches have their own vocabulary and grammar system. Concerning vocabulary, Leech, Rayson and Wilson (2001) analyzed the British National Corpus (BNC) and