The use of connectors in advanced Lithuanian learners' English writing

The topic of text cohesion and numerous ways to achieve it have been covered by a great number of linguists. The focus of this study will be cohesion achieved by the use of connectors in learner English. There is no unanimous agreement reached by scholars on the use of terminology and the importance of connectors. For the purpose of the present study the term connectors will refer to what Quirk et al. (1991) call ‘conjuncts’. The data will be drawn from the Lithuanian subcorpus (LICLE) of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) currently being compiled at Vilnius University, which comprises argumentative essays written by advanced Lithuanian learners of the English language. Using contrastive interlanguage analysis (CIA) the results will be compared to those of the native speakers’ corpus (LOCNESS). The findings from LICLE will also be compared to the findings from other learner corpora reported in numerous studies (Granger and Tyson 1996, Altenberg and Tapper 1998, Narita et al. 2004, Tankó 2004, Chen, 2006, Ai and Peng 2006, Leńko-Szymanicka 2007, etc). TextSTAT-2 (Hüning, 2000/2007) and AntConc 3.2.1w (Anthony 2007) software will be used for the extraction of connectors. Statistical validity of the results will be checked by Log-likelihood calculator (Rayson 2004).

The results suggest that there is a clear tendency for the Lithuanian learners to overuse connectors in their essay writing, though average number of connectors per essay is higher in native speakers’ corpus. To achieve coherence the Lithuanian learners tend to use the same semantic categories but a slightly greater variety of individual connectors. This conforms to the tendency noticed by Altenberg and Tapper (1998) for the native English students to rely more heavily on a limited set of connectors. The findings show that there are statistically significant differences between the Lithuanian learners’ of English and native speakers’ language not only in the overall use of connectors but also in their distribution throughout different paragraphs of an essay as well as in their position in a sentence. Qualitative analysis of the data suggests many cases of misuse of connectors in the Lithuanian learners’ English writing. This may largely be attributed to developmental or intralingual errors and may be considered to be an interlanguage phenomenon, which is also confirmed by similar studies of learners of English from other mother-tongue backgrounds. Inadequate information on the use of connectors in reference tools and language
transfer as possible reasons for misuse of connectors in the essays written by the Lithuanian students are also briefly addressed.

References:


