Report

A Corpus-based Study of Intensifiers in Chinese EFL Learners’ Oral Production

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This paper investigates the use of intensifiers in a corpus of Chinese EFL learners’ spoken English and compares it with that in an English native speakers’ corpus. The corpus-based analysis reveals: (a) that Chinese EFL learners use the booster word very far too much, and this results in a tendency of overstatement; (b) that the overuse of some and underuse of other intensifiers, and the misuse of intensifiers as modifiers to non-gradable adjectives indicate a low accuracy of the learners’ use of intensifiers; and (c) that the learners often resort to the booster word very when maximizers and compromisers are preferred by native speakers. Pedagogical implications of the study are also discussed to shed light on teaching English as a foreign language.

Introduction

In English, degree adverbs, such as very and slightly, are often used to modify adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, indicating the intensity of the meanings expressed by these words and achieving accuracy in word meaning expression. Intensifiers, as these degree adverbs are traditionally termed (Biber, Johansson, Leech, & Finegan, 1999; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985), do not always indicate the increase in the intensity of word meanings. Instead, each intensifier indicates “a point on an abstractly conceived intensifying scale and the point indicated may be relatively high or low.” Therefore, the intensity attached to these