

The Number of Words in a Learner Corpus Related to the Number of Errors.

'Be careful, the more words you write, the more mistakes you will make!'

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Abstract

Most educators believe that there is an interrelation of the size of a text and the number of errors that may occur in that text; fewer mistakes are likely to be found in a short text rather than in a long one. In this paper we aim at examining the validity of this theory so as to accept or reject it in the end. To be more specific, we focus on teaching Italian as a foreign language and we have drawn important information for our research from IFLG, a written learner corpus of Greek students who have been learning Italian.

The investigation of this hypothesis can be done in two ways: 1) the marks given to students' written work are compared with the size of their texts and 2) the number of errors of each text of the learner corpus is counted and then it is compared with its number of words.

For the first type of comparison we created a table using Microsoft Excel whereas for the second type of comparison we used Computer Aided Error Analysis (Granger 1998:8). First, an Error Editor from the University of Athens was used in order to retrieve the errors. Then, the errors were inserted in a database (Bagna 2004: 76-77) and an error - taxonomy was developed and, finally, we compared and contrasted these two parameters: the number of errors and the number of words of each text of the Learner Corpus.

The results of the first analysis do not correlate with the results obtained from the Computer Aided Error Analysis. Another interesting point that the latter method revealed is that the students repeat certain types of errors in long texts and other types of errors in short texts.