

Orality and noun phrase complexity: a corpus-based study of British and Kenyan writing in English

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According to previous research (Biber 1988, Chafe 1982, Halliday 1989), both spoken and written texts display evidence of orality such as lack of planning and elaboration, indicated by the relative frequency of specific linguistic features. On the basis of this evidence, we examine selected text types to determine their position on a cline of orality with a view to investigating whether noun phrase complexity in terms of adjectival premodification can also be said to be sensitive to this concept of orality.

Our first hypothesis is that noun phrases in texts showing more oral features are characterized by a relatively lower degree of adjectival premodification. Our data consist of English texts from Britain and Kenya.

The first step of the study focusses on three genres from the Kenyan subcorpus of ICE-EA (The East African component of The International Corpus of English compiled at Chemnitz University of Technology). These genres are social letters, reportage feature articles and institutional editorials. The aim of this first step is to establish the position of each text type on the orality cline. In the second step our attention is focussed on reportage feature articles alone.

Results obtained in the first step are seen in comparison with those gained from analyses of the same text type taken from two corpora of British English, UPC (the Uppsala Press Corpus) and a corpus of British Tourism and Travel Texts, both compiled at Uppsala University.

Our second hypothesis is that the texts from Kenya will contain more evidence of orality than the British feature articles.

References

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