Linguistic Redundancy:
Cases Studies by Evaluating Oral Performances for Chinese Students in TEM-4

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Abstract

Oral proficiency of EFL students has been deeply investigated in bilingual studies. This research aims to investigate discourse features of repetition and redundancy of Chinese students in English oral tests. Research concerning repetition and redundancy in bilingualism tends to understand how do they serve as teaching methods in classroom settings. In addition, repetition and redundancy are considered as interpersonal strategies in communication. There is rare research discussing repetition and redundancy as lack of oral proficiency in EFL students. This research is conducted to fill such gap. Corpus-based discourse analysis is employed. The Spoken English Corpus of English Learners (abbr. SECCL) is chosen to analyse oral performances of Chinese students in TEM-4 (Test for English majors, Band 4). Analysis reveals that Chinese students are likely to cause repetition and redundancy in terms of word, sentence and text. We have developed four theoretical frameworks from the perspectives of coherence, meaning progression and communicative purposes to illustrate mechanisms of repetition and redundancy. We explain reasons why repetition and redundancy occur, including the processes of transferring linguistic features of parataxis in Chinese into hypotaxis in English, lack of language proficiency, purposeful language choice and educational power. In addition, we recommend strategies to avoid repetition and redundancy in oral English tests. In terms of significance, this research illustrates how transfer process in SLA occurs by analysing English oral performances of Chinese students, which is helpful to further understand bilingual transfer processes in oral circumstances.

Keywords: Repetition, Redundancy, Meaning Progression, Parataxis, Hypotaxis, Coherence, SLA

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INTRODUCTION

People tend to transfer their language habits in their first language into their learning processes of second foreign language (Saville-Troike, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that bilinguals tend to produce their second language with features from their first language. Based on this, this research paper aims to investigate a typical example of transfer. This paper aims to research Chinese bilinguals who are major in English in university in TEM-4 speaking test. It is discovered that Chinese bilinguals tend to reveal the discourse features of repetition and redundancy reflected in English test setting where Chinese students are asked to deliver English speech based on specific types of questions.

Three research questions are delivered throughout this paper:

(1) What are the forms of redundancy?
(2) What factors could result in redundancy to occur in speech?
(3) What measures could be conducted to help avoid redundancy in examinations?

In terms of the first question, this research paper has categorized redundancy in word, sentence and text level. Theoretical models are given to correspond to each categorization for further elaborations.

In terms of the second question, this paper offers explanations from several aspects as discourse features of parataxis in Chinese and hypotaxis in English, language choice, self-correction in speaking process and educational power manipulation.

As for the third question, several practical suggestions are offered based on specific forms of redundancy in speaking processes. It is thought that students should have more accumulation as their language restoration, apply linguistic skills to replace uttering redundant information and reduce frequency of self-correction in speaking processes.

The paper adopts the corpus-based analysis and discourse analysis to further understand the linguistic phenomena of repetition and redundancy in English discourse by native Chinese speakers in examination settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of Redundancy in Previous Research

Traditional definitions of redundancy were categorized into three aspects: substantial, operational and functional (Wit & Gillette, 1999). Substantial definition of redundancy views redundancy as the repetition of information and overlapping of meaning. Another substantial definition is that redundancy contains systematicity in language in sense that what is redundant in information could compensate what is essential in information if the essential one is dismissed. Functional definition of redundancy is based on the quantity of information to discuss the degree where redundancy occurs. Functional definition deems redundancy as a linguistic strategy to improve comprehension between dyads of interlocutors to avoid communicative failures（Nubold & Turner, 1987).

An apparent dichotomy between concepts of redundancy is to differentiate grammatical redundancy and contextual redundancy (Wit & Gillette, 1999). Grammatical redundancy

refs to the phenomenon that there tends to be several syntactic properties that indicate same meaning in a sentence, leading to occurrence of redundancy. Contextual redundancy means that repetition of information in lexical aspects where overlapping of meaning is spotted in lexicons.

In addition, redundancy in information could be categorized as co-textually originated and contextually originated. Co-textual redundancy refers to textual redundancy which serves as overlapping of meaning in its literal meaning. Contextual redundancy refers to reproduction of identical information which is deliberately construed by psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors (Weizman, 2011).

Redundancy is also viewed from multimodality as generation and overlapping of meaning across different modes (Horning, 1979; Goodman, 1969). Mechanism of redundancy in linguistic performance is considered to raise explanations from psycholingual and sociolingual aspects, which means that factors as social conditions, mental states, cultural originations, emotive stimulations, etc. should be taken into consideration (Wit & Gillette, 1999; Bazzanella, 2011).

Previous Research Conducted in Redundancy

Research conducted in redundancy are categorized from three aspects. Firstly, redundancy is on a large scale researched in language teaching (Spolsky, 1969; Darian, 1979; Caulfield & Smith, 1981; Diao & Sweller, 2007; Khodadady, 2012; Larsen-Freeman, 2012; Attofi, 2019; Horvathova, 2019). The role that redundancy serves as a teaching method in language teaching is investigated (Darian, 1979; Attofi, 2019; Horvathova, 2019). Efficiency of informational redundancy in teaching environment is also evaluated (Diao & Sweller, 2007; Attofi, 2019). Besides, many scholars emphasize importance of redundancy in language test by using the concept of reduced redundancy (Spolsky, 1969; Caulfield & Smith, 1981; Khodadady, 2012). Reduced redundancy refers to decreasing frequency of repetitive information in text. This is used in language tests especially in cloze tests to evaluate participants' readability and language proficiency. Secondly, there is much research figuring out relationships between redundancy and other linguistic factors (Weizman, 2011; Goodman, 1969; Moore, 2012; Knutson, 2010) as contextualization, communication, linguistic socialization, etc. Thirdly, there has been research connecting redundancy with Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) by exploring the quantity of speech in communication (Weizman, 2011; Goodman, 1969; Horn, 1993).

Redundancy Re-defined in This Paper

Based on the literature review, Redundancy is re-defined as the linguistic phenomenon of information repetition. Repetition of information could be viewed from the layers of word, sentence and text. Redundancy is categorized from the three levels. In terms of word level, redundancy is externalized as repetition of words. In terms of sentential level, redundancy is revealed as repetition of sentences which contain similar meanings. In terms of text level, redundancy could be viewed as the phenomenon of repetitive uses of words and continuous occurrences of similar or same sentences.

A reminder is that criterion for defining redundancy is not based on the forms. Namely, redundancy is not merely revealed as repetition of components or sentences. Redundancy is over-informativeness in sense that no apparent semantic progression is spotted throughout the

interconnectedness between or among build-ups of textual elements, which is externalized as equivalence or similarity between words or sentences. Therefore, redundancy is evaluated and analyzed from the view that highlights progression in meaning.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a corpus-based study. This research has chosen the Spoken English Corpus of Chinese Learners (abbr. SECCL) as the investigation target. This corpus records students' oral performances in the English oral test of TEM-4 (Test for English Major, Band 4). 96 texts are randomly selected from this corpus. In addition, only the recordings of test 2 are selected. Test 2 refers to the setting where students are required to self-talk for three minutes according to specific questions. There are four sub-corpora in SECCL and six columns in each sub-corpus. Four sub-corpora refer to data collected in four years from 2003 to 2006. 6 columns in each sub-corpus refer to different groups of examinees in each year. 4 texts are randomly selected from each column, thus forming 96 texts constituting as sample size. The process of data analysis is statistically calculated and classified. The linguistic phenomenon of redundancy is classified in word level and sentence level. In addition to this, discourse analysis is conducted in this research. This research has been integrating such sample with other aspects as communicative processes, negative transfer, meaning progression, etc. to build four theoretical models to elaborate underlying mechanisms of redundancy.

There are two reasons why corpus-based analysis and discourse analysis are chosen. On one hand, corpus-based analysis is quantitative and it helps collects sample and data for further statistical analysis, which is more straightforward. On the other hand, discourse analysis analyzes discourse symbols and language, which helps understand structure and implicit meanings of discourse to uncover mechanisms of redundancy in speech.

RESULTS

Data of each sub-corpus is displayed in Table 1.

Year	Frequency of redundancy (word level)	Frequency of redundancy (sentence level)	Total amount
2003	227	72	299
2004	213	50	263
2005	372	15	387
2006	332	10	332

Table 1: Data of each sub-corpus

The frequency of redundancy in word level, sentence level and total amount could be calculated as 1144, 147 and 1281. As there are 96 texts serving as sample size in this research, the mean value of each could be nearly calculated as 12, 2 and 14.

It is reasonable to assume that students who take TEM-4 English speaking tests tend to repeat words for about 12 times and sentences twice. The average value is nearly 14, which means that Chinese students are expected to repeat information for about 14 times in a three-minute oral test.

Redundancy in Terms of Word Level

Redundancy in terms of word level is underlined for better reference in the example below. Same symbols for underlines indicate the same word.

Example 1: Redundancy in Terms of Word Level
"Once there was an old lady, he she lived... besid Lily's house, she had no baby she had no son or daughters, so she lived by her own. but because she was old she couldn't take care of herself, then Lily, a school a school a school... uni- a school student take took care of her."

In this case, words as "she", "school" and "take" are repeated. The utterer speaks "he" at first and re-utters "she". The utterer also speaks "school" for four times and "take" twice. Redundancy in terms of its word level is externalized as the tautology of words in a continuous and connected speech.

One theoretical model is formalized to explain the mechanism underlying functions of redundancy in word level.
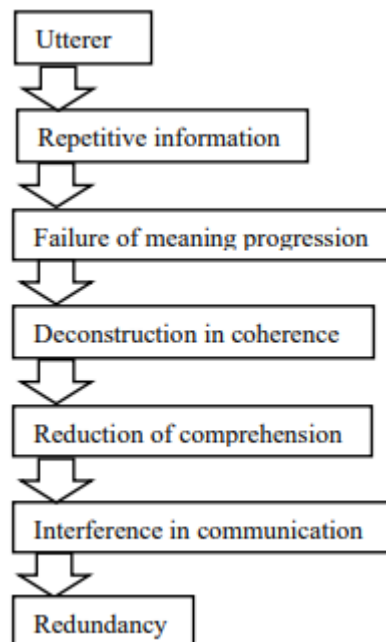

Figure 1: Theoretical Model Accounting for Word Redundancy

It is thought that the basis for redundancy to occur is the information overlapping in communication, which is repetitive information. When information is overlapped in communication, meaning of speech from the side of interlocutor is hard to progress. As there is no new information coming into communicative processes, coherence of text will be decreased to some degree. This will lead to reduction in comprehension in listener's side. Once comprehension of communication is reduced, communication will be hard to progress. Deconstruction of coherence in communicational dynamics will cause the impression of "redundancy" to occur.

Another example is offered to test the rationality of this theoretical model. Redundant words are underlined for better referencing.

Example 2: Redundancy in Terms of Word Level
"*He just er he just he just con er ca er he just care about himself.*"

Redundancy comes from the usages of words "he" and "just". It could be discovered that the core information in this clause in "He just cares about himself". However, the components "he" and "just" are repeated four times in constructing such information. From the perspective of the theoretical model, the repetitive words cause the sentence to be static in meaning progression, which means that there is no new information generation. It could be spotted as:

"*He just he just he just he just…*"

This sentence is not understandable as there is no predicate involved in. No one knows what this person (he) does and the meaning is incomplete. This will result in destruction in coherence within the sentence as the meaning is not progressed and there is no access to reach relevance in meaning. As meaning cannot be reached, comprehension of listeners will be on a large scale reduced. There tends to have bigger risk of discontinuity in communication. Impression of "redundancy" will occur to evaluate the speaker's speech.

Redundancy in Terms of Sentential Level

In this paper, there are two sorts of sentential redundancy. This paper will divide them into two sub-sections for clarity.

The First type

Redundancy tends to be revealed as information repeated across sentences. One example is shown below for further analysis.

Example 3: Redundancy in Terms of Sentence Level (the First Type)
"*Where is love? Love is truth feeling that somebody expresses to another. Maybe express somebody's love to somebody's wife and children and parents and all of and all the close friend on this one. And everyone need love and everyone should be loved. Why? Love is not also give some concrete fortune to somebody but also bring him some inside ..., no one can be discard and everyone should get a love from others. And love is eternal credit to our lives. Whenever whenever we are, love will will be around us from our close friend and our parents and also maybe come from our wives and children.*"

From this example, it could be seen that the second sentence and the last one to some degree overlap with each other in sense that they both highlights the relationships between love and people as family members and friends. However, the impression of redundancy to this speech is not merely evoked by repetition of these two sentences. It is argued that the way where other sentences are combined and interconnected will have huge impacts on people's evaluations on speech. In this example, other sentences are combined in a more than non-logical way. For instance, from the third sentence, it is known that the speaker has put an argument as "*everyone needs love and to be loved*", which is immediately followed by a word "why". Therefore, there logical relationship of causality could be easily spotted in this text. Whereas, the answer is very confusing as it says "*Love is not to give concrete fortune to people but to offer something inside*".

The causal relationship could be interpreted as everyone needs love and to be loved because love is not to offer concrete fortune but to offer something inside. Despite that these sentences are grammatically construed, it is not understandable in its semantic sense and the logical relationship within this sentence is constructed in a more than confusing way. Such a chaotic construction in this text will lead to enhancement in impression of "redundancy". Speech uttered factually obeys a linear and chronological pattern as:

A-B-C-D-A

Letters here refer to sentences. Once the listener hears the first sentence A, he or she will continue listening to input of other information as B, C and D. However, B, C and D are constructed in a more than chaotic way, which means that they are not understandable or confusing. Listener will be likely to form negative impressions on such construction, deeming this as "bad", "chaotic" and "non-logical". Once the speaker re-utters the first sentence A immediately following D, the listener will be very likely to form the impression of "redundancy". The evaluation is not merely originated from repetition. It is more likely to be evoked by the construction of other sentences in a text. Therefore, the reason why the second and the fifth sentences are deemed redundant information is for the chaotic construction of information between them, which is externalized as the wrongly use of logical relationship of causality. Information between the second sentence and fifth one derives the negative impression and evaluations on the speaker. Therefore, once the speaker re-utters the same or similar sentences, it tends to be recognized as redundancy. Hence, the theoretical model accounting for its mechanism should be displayed in Fig. 2:
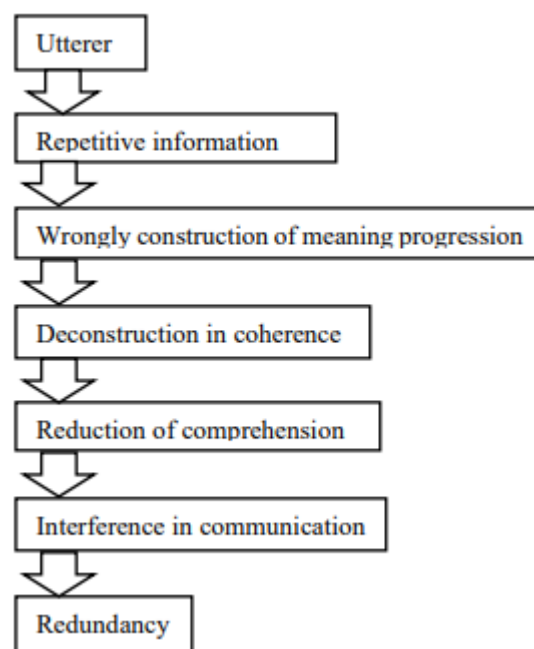

Figure 2: Theoretical Model Accounting for Sentential Redundancy (Type 1)

The Second Type

There is another form of sentence redundancy as repetitive use of same linguistic data in speech. One example is offered below for further analysis.

Example 4: Redundancy in Terms of Sentential Level (Type 2)

"We should have a... we should have a air... a eye to found the beauty and to enjoy the beauty. It's it's important to our life. We should value the things. We stay with our parents and our friends. We should learn we should learn to thank our parents because they give our life. We also should thank our friends, although sometimes we er didn't get on well with my friends <fringe>, but from the things, we can er become strong and learn. We also thank... we also thank the hardship. Because of the hardship we shou... we should we must be- become stronger and struggle and they can stand up in the world." From the teacher's words, I think about many thing in my be- ... in my daily life. I'm I always... angry with anybody, are always complaint everything, I always say er many er... word hurt my friends, and sometimes also er friends hurt hut my heart. But from my teacher's lesson, I know we I should thank everything, everybody, thank my parents, thank my friend, thank everyone who sneer who sneer you, although who hurt my heart. I also thankful, we I... I should have a air (eye) to found the beauty and enjoy the beauty."

From this excerpt, the sentence "*have an eye to find beauty and enjoy beauty*" is uttered in the first sentence and in the last sentence. In terms of the reasons why such redundancy could occur, it is thought in this paper that language choice in specific settings could result in redundancy in constructing information for interlocutors. One theoretical model is displayed below for further elaboration.
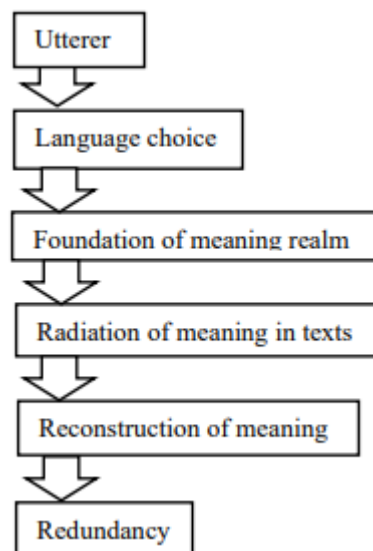

Figure 3: Theoretical Model Accounting for Sentential Redundancy (Type 2)

In this excerpt, *"Have an eye to find beauty and enjoy beauty"* serves as one language choice or linguistic material that utterer mentally restores in conversation. This choice could help to frame a semantic realm to negotiate and combine other meanings in a text. Namely, language choice could influence construction of other meanings, which is externalized as construction of sentences containing same or similar meanings. Therefore, the sentence *"Have an eye to find beauty and enjoy beauty"* is repeated in the last sentence.

Redundancy in Terms of Both Sentence and Word Level

It is stated that there is inter-relationship between both sentence and word redundancy. The first example is shown below. Redundant information in terms of both sentence and word level is underlined.

Example 5: Redundancy in Both Sentence and Word Level
"*And every students who lived <u>in a in a in a</u> center of the city, ... <u>quickly, quickly go went home, quickly went home</u>. And, ... there and there was only me who stayed... stayed in the classroom and I was very frightened.*"

In this excerpt, "quickly", "went", "home" and "quickly went home" here pertain to be redundant language data. In terms of word level, repetition of "quickly" and "went" corresponds to the type of redundancy discussed in the previous section. In terms of sentential level, the part lastly underlined could be interpreted as re-construction of previous language data ("quickly", "went" and "home"). As for how such an utterance "quickly went home" is construed, it is thought that the whole process includes the process of self-confirmation and of meaning reconstruction. In the first half, "quickly" and "go" is repeated, which indicates that the speaker utters these words to check whether these words are useful to construe what he/she wants to say, i.e., denotes the process of information self-confirmation. Afterward, the speaker reconstructs those fragmentary components (quickly, go) as "quickly went home". Though this example, some interconnectedness between words and sentences could be spotted.

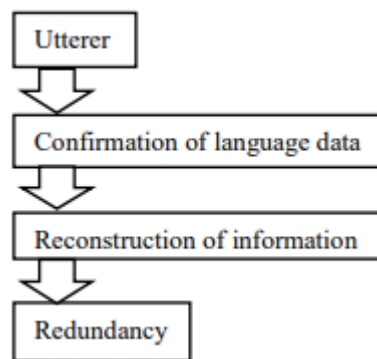One theoretical model of mechanism is presented in Fig. 4.

Figure 4: Theoretical Model Accounting for Both Sentence and Word Redundancy

Confirmation of language data tends to indicate confirmation to meaning components, words in special. "Construction of information" is always externalized in form of sentence.

Another example is presented below to further test rationality of such model.

Example 6: Redundancy in Both Sentential and Wordy Level
"*Immediately, tears, I... I broke, I immediately I broke into tears.*"

From this excerpt, semantic expression is incomplete by viewing the fragmented components in the first half. The first time of uttering components is not to construct speech. Nevertheless, it is to check the information to be used in speech. In the second half, all components are

repeated in form of sentences. The meaning is reconstructed. However, this leads to the discourse redundancy in both sentence and word level.

DISCUSSION

This section will mainly focus on the reasons why redundancy tends to occur under the circumstance where Chinese students speak English in English oral tests. In addition to discussing reasons, this section will provide some practicality and limitations.

Reasons Accounting for Redundancy

Parataxis in Chinese and Hypotaxis in English

In terms of the first type of sentential redundancy, sentential redundancy is likely to be caused by chaotic construction of information between sentences. How message is composed and constructed will on a large-scale affect listeners' perceptions on information and communication.

One possible explanation accounting for occurrences of the sentential redundancy is for the linguistic trait of parataxis in Chinese and hypotaxis in English (Halliday, 2004). Chinese is paratactic in its discourse construction, which means that Chinese values importance on relevance between or among different meanings rather than highlighting importance on logical relationships and forms helping construct utterances. Parataxis in Chinese indicates that meaning is more freely and subjectively perceived. However, English is a hypotactic language, which values importance of forms, logical relationships and explicit relevance between different meanings (Halliday, 2004). Thus, meaning in English is perceived in a more fixed and stable way.

In the process of transforming Chinese into English, process of negative transfer (Saville-Troike, 2012) will be evoked in the sense that Chinese speakers will inevitably be influenced by the paratactic discourse feature of Chinese, which means that parataxis functions in their processes of constructing English utterances. Hence, English texts that they form tend to be less tight in terms of logical relations and relevance in forms, which means that utterances Chinese people construct are to some degree perceived as less logical and fixed. Therefore, listeners (especially examiners in English oral tests) are more likely to evaluate those English discourses produced by Chinese speakers as chaotic and non-logical, which cultivates higher possibility for listeners to deem information as redundant.

Language Choice

As for the second type of sentential redundancy, one reason to account for the phenomenon of sentential redundancy is purposeful selection of language. In the settings of speaking tests, utterances are composed and constructed not in a natural way, but in a way where participants feel most at ease. This means that speakers tend to select their language that is most familiar for them. Unfamiliar linguistic materials for examinees means potential risk of getting embarrassed. Purpose of utilizing familiar linguistic materials serving as preparations is to cater exam requirements in which fluency tends to be deemed as an important standard for marking and evaluation. Therefore, some redundant sentential information is to some degree activated by the linguistic materials that participants are most familiar with to evoke the impression of fluent output of information to the examiner to get higher scores.

Language Proficiency

Regarding to word redundancy, lack of language proficiency in students could provide some explanations. Language learners are likely to get confused sometimes in speaking due to factors as syntax, vocabulary, etc. Therefore, students tend to repeat words sometimes when speaking. Additionally, self-correction sometimes occurs in their speaking processes to correct the words wrongly used. Self-correction (Schegloff and Jefferson, 1977) refers to the process where speaker self-checks and confirms correctness in language expressions. It is more than common in educationally conversational contexts as classroom, examination setting, etc. Self-correction ensures that meaning is understood by the side of receiver and avoids non-fluency in speaking. Purpose of self-correction is to maintain appropriateness in the self-image linguistically expressed. However, this process could cause redundancy as self-correction tends to occur in the form of repeating linguistic components. Speakers are likely to repeat components in sentences until they think they have clearly conveyed meaning, which finally turns out to have much rigmarole.

Tensity from Examinational and Educational Scenarios

Power can be witnessed by observing contents, relationships and subjects in specific settings (Fairclough, 1989). Namely, it is reasonable to say power dynamics exists within the realm where interpersonal relationship is conducted, which means that analyzing discourse might be originated in its stem of power control.

It is common for people to encounter moments when they find it hard to fluently and concisely express themselves. People sometimes suffer from information block in their process of constructing utterances. Pauses tend to occur when people suffer from such a dilemma where no appropriate utterances could be produced to dyads for further communication.

However, under the circumstance of examination settings, such a natural reaction caused by information block has to be avoided as far as possible. As getting stuck in speaking indicates lower language proficiency in speaking and is likely to result in low marks in tests, participants have to keep talking. As they might not be capable to naturally construct their utterances, redundancy might serve as attempt for counterbalance. Redundancy in speaking tests is very likely to be caused under the coercion of educational power control which deems getting stuck in speaking tests as inferior.

Recommendations

There are three recommendations that this research offers to Chinese students who will be taking English speaking tests in the future.

Firstly, as students tend to repeat those linguistic restorations which are most familiar to them, it is suggested that students should pay attention to multiple kinds of language materials as restoration to be used in speaking tests to decrease the frequency of repetitive use of same language expressions.

Secondly, it is discovered that Chinese students tend to repeat words for many times in delivering speech. It is advised that students should raise the awareness of using sequencing words or conjunctions as "well", "like" and "you know" to replace the second even third

repetitive use of words. Using such words could decrease the negative impression of "redundancy" raised by examiners.

Thirdly, self-correction is not highly suggested in speaking in sense that self-correction tends to cause repetitive use of words, which will be more than likely to result in the negative impression of "redundancy". Hence, under the condition that meaning could be correctly transferred to the side of listener, self-correction in terms of grammar, pronunciation, etc. could be ignored to some degree to maintain better fluency and continuity in speech.

Limitations

There are three limitations spotted in this study, which are separately elaborated below.
Firstly, it is thought that contextual analysis in this study is not comprehensive. Contextual analysis refers to analysis excluded from textual cues and included as extra-textual factors, i.e., societal factors (e.g., cultural influences, interpersonal relationships, etc.) should get engaged in. Despite this research mentions the importance of educational scenarios, such contextual analysis is not comprehensive because this study cannot reproduce the environment where speaking test took place. Therefore, contextual analysis is insufficient in this research.

Secondly, adoption of the corpus SECCL might be out-of-date to some degree in sense that this corpus records linguistic data from 2003 to 2006, which is nearly 20 years far away from nowadays. Despite the fact that discourse features of one language in specific group of speakers should not drastically change, it is thought that English proficiency of students who is major in English should to some degree be different from that 20 years ago.

Thirdly, this study merely chooses 96 sample as sample size, which covers nearly 10 percentage of this corpus. Further research could adopt larger sample to test the practicality of findings in this research.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we explore the language features of repetition and redundancy in Chinese students in English oral tests of TEM-4. This research adopts the corpus of Spoken English Corpus of English Learners (abbr. SECCL) to conduct discourse analysis. There are 96 samples randomly chosen to be statistically calculated and analyzed. It reveals that Chinese students are likely to have wordy and sentential tautology in speech. On this basis, discourse analysis is conducted. Four essential theoretical models are built to explain potential mechanisms of redundancy. In addition, this paper offers some possible explanations to account for redundancy in several aspects, including linguistic features of parataxis in Chinese and hypotaxis in English, deliberate language choice, shortfalls of language proficiency in Chinese students and tensity of educational scenarios. Furthermore, several recommendations are offered for Chinese students who will be taking English speaking tests. Ultimately, some limitations of this research are mentioned, which will be beneficial for further research to be conducted in the future. These results contribute to bilingual research especially research in testing language proficiency and the process of negative transfer in bilingual educational settings.

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