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The Influence of Machine Translation on College Students English Learning

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Abstract

English is a fundamental course that all college students in China should learn. With the development of modern information technology, many college students use machine translation software in the process of learning English. As an emerging technology, machine translation software can greatly improve the efficiency of college students' English learning, but it can also bring some adverse effects to their

English learning. This article adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, mainly analyzing the needs, advantages and disadvantages of machine translation software for college students' English learning, in order to provide some beneficial inspiration to college students in English learning.

Keywords: Machine Translation, College Students, English Learning, Advantages and Disadvantages

Introduction

Machine translation, also known as automatic translation, is the process of using computers to convert one language (source language) into another language (target language) (Li, B., 2021) ^[1]. With the development of modern technology and the advent of the network age, information technology and college students' learning methods are constantly integrating. In the process of English learning, it has gradually become a popular behavior among college students that use machine translation to assist learning (Wu, F., 2020) ^[2]. College students do not know how to deal with complex English sentences and unknown words, which leads to practical difficulties in learning English. In the past, English translation was manual translation, and the quality and accuracy of translation often depended on the translator's English ability. In addition, the way of human translation is slow and inefficient, which is difficult to meet the English learning needs of college students. With the continuous development of technology, the emergence of machine translation has alleviated this situation (Zhu, Z., 2021) ^[3]. Many translation software are becoming more and more perfect, which has played an important role in college students' English learning.

Translation software, as an application in language learning, especially in English, has been paid more and more attention in recent years, which helps college students save time in learning English (Zhang, S. & Hu, Q., 2019) ^[4]. However, in the actual use process, there are many problems in English-Chinese translation software, which are prone to errors in vocabulary and word order, which also has a negative impact on College Students' English learning. This paper will research on the influence of machine translation on college students' English learning. It will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What are the needs for college students to use machine translation software?
2. What are the benefits of machine translation software on college students' English learning?
3. What are the disadvantages of machine translation software to college students' English learning?

Materials and Method

The participants are 100 college students in a university in Hebei Province, China, including 29 boys and 71 girls; 16 English majors and 84 non-English majors; 37 freshmen, 21 sophomores, 27 junior and 15 seniors.

The study follows a quantitative research design to achieve the purpose of the study. According to the statement of problems, the study designs the questionnaire on the use of translation software in college students' English learning. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part is the basic information of college students, which includes gender, grade and major. The second part is the investigation of college students' behavior in using translation software. In this part, it mainly includes the situational needs, functional needs, purpose needs, as well as the effectiveness and evaluation of translation software.

Results and Discussion

1. The Needs of Machine Translation

College students show a certain needs tendency of using machine translation. In terms of using situations, when college students prepare for CET-4 and CET-6 (66%), prepare for English final exam (54%) and attend English class (49%) have become the most often situation to use English translation software. While they rarely use translation software in extracurricular English learning (32%) and daily communication (9%). In terms of usage needs, college students often use translation software to translate (81%), read (70%) and write (45%). In contrast, speaking (30%), and listening (14%) are used less frequently. In the demand tendency for the functions of the software itself, the use of the three functions of looking up words (84.1%), sentence translation (74.5%) and photo translation (54.3%) ranks in the top three, while the use rate of speech translation (31.3%) is the lowest.

2. The Beneficial Influence of Machine Translation Software on College Students' English learning

Machine translation software is fast and convenient, so it is very popular among college students. By using machine translation software, college students can save the time of consulting a large number of materials and effectively improve their efficiency of learning English (Bareq, R., 2020)^[5].

Most machine translation software have relatively complete functions. It can not only help students find the meaning of words, but also help students translate the complex sentences even full text. It can comprehensively meet the needs of students in English learning. In addition, if users find that the machine translation software is impractical in the process of work, they can also edit the machine translation results by themselves.

In addition, most translation software is free, which can greatly reduce the learning cost of students. Because most college students have no economic income, this has a strong attraction for college students.

3. The Negative Influence of Machine Translation Software on College Students' English Learning

Although the machine translation software shows a good speed and efficiency, it is difficult for machine translation software to consider the specific situation of language (Hu, W., 2015)^[6]. After all, the translation results of machine translation software do not go through the thinking of the brain, and the flexibility is relatively poor. As a result, students often encounter the problem that the translation results of machine translation software are incomprehensible, which has an adverse impact on college students' English learning.

The vocabulary of machine translation software is constantly enriched. However, there is a common problem that sometimes the translation result is quite shallow. When students need professional translation, machine translation is very easy to mislead students and affect the accuracy of students' translation.

Though the function of machine translation software has been improving, in reality, the setting of program still has its own limitations. For new words and usages generated in the process of cultural development, machine translation software is difficult to achieve accurate translation (Cui, L., 2011)^[7].

Indeed, machine translation software can help students understand English materials well, but many college students rely too much on machine translation software in the process of learning English, which can easily make college students slack off and affect their normal English learning (Tim & Ivan, 2020)^[8].

Conclusion

According to the research of current use of Machine Translation software in college students, machine translation software provides a lot of convenience for college students' English learning, but at the same time, machine translation software is relatively lack of flexibility. In other words, although machine translation software has the advantages of convenience and quickness, it also has strong limitations, which also leads to a long way to go in its application. It is difficult for machine translation software to completely replace human translation. College students still need to be cautious in the process of using machine translation software. They can use it to translate some basic words and short sentences, and avoid over reliance on it in the process of learning English.

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