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A Comparative Study on the Enhancement of Lexical Richness in Students' English Argumentative Writing by Different Large Language Models

Wentong Chen

Guilin University of Technology, China

Abstract: This study investigates the impact of different large language models (LLMs) on lexical richness in student argumentative writing. By comparing the outputs of LLMs like GPT-3 and LaMDA, the research aims to identify specific linguistic features and stylistic variations introduced by each model. The study analyzes the extent to which LLMs enhance lexical density, lexical diversity and lexical sophistication in student writing, considering factors like authenticity, originality, and student learning. Quantitative and qualitative analyses are employed to assess lexical richness scores and identify stylistic patterns. The findings provide insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of using LLMs for enhancing lexical richness in student writing, offering practical recommendations for educators on their appropriate integration into writing instruction.

Keywords: Large Language Models; Lexical Richness; Argumentative Writing.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Rise of LLMs in Education

The advent of large language models (LLMs) has ushered in a new era of technological advancement, with profound implications for various sectors, including education. LLMs, characterized by their ability to process and generate human-like text, have garnered significant attention for their potential to revolutionize writing assistance in educational settings (Brown et al., 2020). This growing interest stems from the inherent capabilities of LLMs to generate coherent and grammatically correct text, offer suggestions for improving writing style, and even provide insights into the clarity and persuasiveness of written work.

The increasing use of LLMs in education is driven by a confluence of factors, including the growing availability of powerful LLMs, the increasing reliance on technology in educational settings, and the need for more effective and efficient methods of supporting student writing. As educators and researchers grapple with the potential benefits and challenges of LLMs in education, a critical question emerges: how do these models impact the quality of student writing, particularly in terms of lexical richness?

1.2. Lexical Richness as a Key Indicator of Writing Quality

Building upon the discussion of LLMs in education, it is crucial to examine the role of lexical richness in assessing writing quality. Lexical richness, defined as the variety and sophistication of vocabulary used in writing (Nation, 2001), is a key indicator of writing quality in argumentative writing. It significantly impacts clarity, persuasiveness, and overall writing quality. A rich vocabulary allows writers to express their ideas with precision and nuance, enhancing the clarity and persuasiveness of their arguments (Read, 2000). Moreover, a diverse lexicon demonstrates the writer's command of the language, contributing to a more sophisticated and authoritative tone.

Research has shown a strong correlation between lexical richness and writing quality, particularly in academic settings (Coxhead, 2000). Students with a wider vocabulary tend to produce more complex and engaging arguments, effectively conveying their ideas to the reader. Conversely, limited vocabulary can hinder the clarity and persuasiveness of writing, potentially leading to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Therefore, understanding the role of lexical richness in argumentative writing is crucial for evaluating the quality of student work and for guiding writing instruction.

1.3. The Need for Comparative Studies on LLMs and Lexical Richness

While research has explored the potential of LLMs in education (e.g., (Brown et al., 2020)), a critical gap exists in understanding the specific effects of different LLMs on lexical richness in student writing. Existing studies often focus on general writing quality or specific LLM capabilities, neglecting the nuanced impact on lexical diversity and sophistication. This omission hinders our ability to fully assess the pedagogical value of LLMs in enhancing students' writing skills.

Comparative studies are crucial to address this gap. By systematically comparing the lexical richness of student writing generated with different LLMs, researchers can identify potential strengths and weaknesses of each model. Such analysis would shed light on whether LLMs promote or hinder lexical diversity, providing valuable insights for educators and developers. For example, comparing the lexical richness of outputs from GPT-3 and LaMDA could reveal differences in their ability to generate diverse and sophisticated vocabulary, informing decisions about which LLM is best suited for specific writing tasks.

Furthermore, comparing LLM-generated text with human-written text would provide a benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of LLMs in promoting lexical richness. Such comparisons could reveal whether LLMs can effectively emulate human writing styles and vocabulary choices, or whether they introduce biases or limitations that impact lexical diversity. This type of comparative analysis would be essential for understanding the potential of LLMs to enhance

lexical richness in student writing and inform the development of effective pedagogical strategies.

1.4. Research Objectives and Goals

This research seeks to investigate the impact of different LLMs on lexical richness in student writing. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Compare the capabilities of various LLMs in generating text with diverse and sophisticated vocabulary. This objective will involve analyzing the lexical richness of text generated by different LLMs using established metrics such as the Type-Token Ratio (TTR) and the Lexical Density (LD) (Nation, 2001).
2. Identify linguistic features associated with lexical richness in LLM-generated text. This objective will involve examining the types of words, phrases, and sentence structures used by different LLMs to achieve lexical richness.
3. Analyze the potential benefits and drawbacks of using LLMs for lexical richness enhancement in student writing. This objective will involve considering the potential benefits of LLMs in providing students with access to diverse vocabulary and improving their writing quality, as well as the potential drawbacks such as the risk of plagiarism and the need for careful monitoring and evaluation.
4. Develop practical recommendations for educators on how to effectively integrate LLMs into their teaching practices to promote lexical richness in student writing. This objective will involve drawing on the findings of the research to provide educators with practical strategies for using LLMs to enhance student vocabulary and writing skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Large Language Models (LLMs)

2.1.1. LLM Architecture and Capabilities

Large language models (LLMs) are a recent advancement in artificial intelligence, demonstrating remarkable capabilities in natural language processing (NLP) tasks. These models, trained on massive datasets of text and code, have achieved impressive performance in various domains, including text generation, translation, summarization, and question answering (Brown et al., 2020). LLMs are typically built upon transformer architectures, which enable them to process and understand long sequences of text by attending to relevant parts of the input (Vaswani et al., 2017). This attention mechanism allows LLMs to capture complex relationships between words and phrases, leading to more nuanced and contextually aware outputs.

LLMs are capable of generating human-quality text, offering valuable assistance in writing tasks. Their ability to generate coherent and grammatically correct text has made them useful tools for writers, particularly in tasks such as brainstorming, outlining, and drafting (Radford et al., 2019). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of LLMs. While they excel at generating fluent text, they may lack the depth of understanding and critical thinking abilities that are essential for high-quality writing (Park et al., 2022). Additionally, LLMs can sometimes produce biased or inaccurate information, emphasizing the need for careful evaluation and critical analysis of their outputs.

The development of LLMs has significantly advanced the field of NLP, opening up new possibilities for writing assistance and education. As these models continue to evolve, it is essential to understand their strengths and limitations, ensuring their responsible and ethical use in various applications. The next section will delve into the specific applications and challenges of LLMs in educational contexts, exploring their potential to enhance student learning and writing skills.

2.1.2. LLMs in Education: Applications and Challenges

Building upon the discussion of LLM capabilities, their potential applications in education are vast and multifaceted. LLMs can be utilized as writing assistants, providing feedback on grammar, style, and clarity (Hashimoto et al., 2022). They can also generate personalized learning materials, adapt to individual learning styles, and offer interactive learning experiences (Wang et al., 2022). This potential for personalized and engaging learning environments is particularly promising for diverse learners and those with specific learning needs.

However, the integration of LLMs in education also presents significant challenges. One primary concern is the potential for plagiarism, as students may rely on LLMs to generate text without understanding the underlying concepts (Kelleher & Paxton, 2022). Moreover, LLMs are susceptible to biases inherent in the data they are trained on, potentially perpetuating existing inequalities and limiting diverse perspectives (Bender et al., 2021). The ethical implications of using LLMs in education, particularly regarding authorship, accountability, and the potential for misuse, require careful consideration and robust safeguards.

Furthermore, while LLMs can provide valuable support, they cannot replace the role of educators in fostering critical thinking, creativity, and deeper understanding. It is crucial to integrate LLMs in a way that promotes active learning, critical engagement with content, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. The focus should be on utilizing LLMs as tools to enhance learning, not as substitutes for human interaction and guidance.

2.2. Lexical Richness in Writing

2.2.1. Measuring Lexical Richness

Measuring lexical richness in writing involves quantifying the diversity, complexity, and semantic richness of the vocabulary used. Several metrics are employed to assess these aspects, each offering a unique perspective on the writer's lexical proficiency.

One commonly used approach is to assess lexical diversity, which measures the range of different words used in a text. Metrics like type-token ratio (TTR) and the D statistic (D) quantify this diversity by comparing the number of unique words (types) to the total number of words (tokens) (McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010). A higher TTR or D value indicates greater vocabulary diversity. Beyond simple word count, researchers also examine the complexity of the vocabulary used. Measures like the mean word length and the frequency of rare words provide insights into the complexity of the language used in a text (Nation, 2001). A higher mean word length or frequency of rare words suggests greater lexical complexity. Finally, semantic richness, which refers to the variety and depth of meaning conveyed by the vocabulary used, is also an important aspect of lexical richness. Metrics like the number of different semantic categories used in a text or the use of synonyms and antonyms can be employed to assess semantic richness (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

While these metrics offer valuable insights into lexical richness, it's crucial to recognize that they are not without

limitations. Metrics like TTR can be influenced by text length, while measures of complexity may not always capture the nuances of semantic richness. Therefore, a comprehensive assessment of lexical richness should consider a combination of these metrics, taking into account the specific context and purpose of the writing.

2.2.2. Lexical Richness in Argumentative Writing

Building upon the foundational understanding of lexical richness in writing, this section delves into the unique considerations for argumentative texts. Argumentative writing, by its very nature, necessitates a high degree of precision and clarity in language (Biber, 2006). Authors must carefully select vocabulary that accurately reflects the nuances of their arguments, while simultaneously engaging the reader through persuasive language.

Beyond the choice of individual words, argumentative writing demands skillful manipulation of sentence structure to enhance the flow and impact of the argument. Varied sentence lengths and complex sentence structures can create a sense of rhythm and sophistication, while also highlighting key points. Moreover, the effective use of rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, similes, and analogies, can add depth and persuasiveness to the argument (Flower & Hayes, 1981). These devices allow writers to connect with readers on an emotional level, making the argument more memorable and impactful.

In conclusion, argumentative writing demands a sophisticated approach to lexical richness, encompassing precise vocabulary, varied sentence structure, and the strategic deployment of rhetorical devices. This combination allows writers to craft compelling arguments that are both intellectually stimulating and emotionally engaging.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a comparative research design to investigate the impact of LLMs on lexical richness in argumentative writing. This approach allows for a direct comparison of student writing samples produced with and without the assistance of LLMs, enabling a nuanced understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks of LLM use.

The selection of LLMs for this study is guided by their prominence in the field of natural language processing and their accessibility for educational purposes. Specifically, the study will focus on two widely recognized LLMs: GPT-3 (OpenAI, 2020) and LaMDA (Google AI, 2022). These LLMs were chosen due to their advanced language generation capabilities, including the ability to produce coherent and grammatically correct text, as well as their capacity to adapt to various writing styles and contexts (Brown et al., 2020; Google AI, 2022).

To ensure a robust and representative dataset, student writing samples will be collected from a diverse range of academic disciplines and educational levels. The selection criteria for student writing samples will prioritize argumentative essays that demonstrate a clear thesis statement, supporting evidence, and logical reasoning. This approach ensures that the study focuses on the specific writing skills that are most relevant to the development of lexical richness in argumentative writing. Furthermore, the study will incorporate a balanced representation of student writing samples with varying levels of lexical richness, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of LLMs across different writing proficiency levels.

3.2. Data Collection

This subsection details the process of data collection for this study, encompassing both student-generated argumentative essays and LLM-generated outputs. The collection of student essays involved the selection of a representative sample of undergraduate students enrolled in a university-level writing course. Students were tasked with writing argumentative essays in response to a set of carefully crafted prompts designed to elicit diverse perspectives and argumentative strategies. These prompts were chosen based on their relevance to current academic discourse and their ability to stimulate critical thinking and argumentation. For instance, one prompt explored the ethical implications of artificial intelligence in education, while another focused on the role of social media in shaping public opinion.

To ensure a robust comparison, LLM outputs were generated for each student essay. Two prominent LLMs, GPT-3 (OpenAI, 2020) and LaMDA (Google AI, 2022), were selected for their advanced language capabilities and their prominence in the field of natural language processing. These LLMs were instructed to generate argumentative essays mirroring the student responses, utilizing the same prompts and adhering to the same word count limitations. The resulting LLM outputs provided a valuable benchmark against which the student essays could be analyzed, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the similarities and differences in lexical richness between human and machine-generated writing.

This data collection strategy ensures a comprehensive and balanced dataset for the study, enabling a thorough analysis of the relationship between lexical richness and the use of LLMs in argumentative writing. The collection of both student essays and LLM outputs allows for a direct comparison of human and machine-generated writing, providing valuable insights into the potential impact of LLMs on writing quality and the nuances of lexical richness in argumentative discourse.

3.3. Data Analysis

3.3.1. Quantitative Analysis

To compare the lexical richness of LLM outputs and student writing samples, we employed a quantitative approach, analyzing lexical diversity indices and other relevant metrics. This section details the statistical methods used to assess and compare the lexical richness of the generated texts.

First, we calculated the type-token ratio (TTR) for each text, which measures the proportion of unique words to the total number of words. A higher TTR indicates greater lexical diversity. (Nation, 2001) This metric was chosen due to its simplicity and widespread use in lexical richness analysis. Additionally, we employed the vocabulary richness index (VR), which accounts for the frequency of words in a text, offering a more nuanced measure of lexical diversity. (McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010) This index is particularly useful for comparing texts with different lengths, as it considers the frequency distribution of words. By applying these metrics, we aim to quantify the lexical richness of both student writing samples and LLM outputs, enabling a direct comparison of their lexical diversity.

3.3.2. Qualitative Analysis

Complementing the quantitative analysis, qualitative methods were employed to delve deeper into the linguistic characteristics of the LLMs' outputs. This involved a close examination of vocabulary choices, sentence structure, and overall writing style, seeking to identify specific features and stylistic variations introduced by each LLM.

By analyzing the lexical choices of each LLM, we sought to understand their individual strengths and weaknesses in terms of vocabulary diversity and appropriateness. For example, we investigated whether certain LLMs favored more complex or technical vocabulary, while others leaned towards simpler, more colloquial language. This analysis was further enriched by examining the sentence structure employed by each LLM, paying particular attention to sentence length, complexity, and the use of grammatical structures. This allowed us to assess the LLMs' ability to generate fluent and grammatically correct text, as well as their capacity to produce varied and engaging writing styles.

Through this qualitative analysis, we aimed to gain a nuanced understanding of the linguistic nuances introduced by each LLM, going beyond simple measures of lexical richness to explore the subtle differences in writing style and the potential impact these differences could have on the overall quality and effectiveness of the generated text. This approach provided a deeper understanding of the LLMs' capabilities and limitations, contributing to a more comprehensive assessment of their potential applications in educational contexts.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Analysis Results

Having established the qualitative differences in lexical richness between LLMs and student writing, we now turn to a quantitative analysis to provide a more precise and objective assessment. The statistical analysis employed in this study aimed to quantify the lexical diversity of the generated text, comparing it to the lexical richness of human-written student essays. This approach allows for a more rigorous examination of the nuances in vocabulary usage and the potential impact of LLMs on the linguistic complexity of written output.

The analysis revealed that the LLMs exhibited a range of lexical richness scores, with some models demonstrating higher levels of lexical diversity than others. Notably, the LLM with the highest lexical richness score consistently produced text that was more varied and sophisticated in terms of vocabulary usage, approaching the levels observed in the student writing samples. However, it is important to note that the overall lexical richness of the LLM-generated text was still significantly lower than that of the student writing, suggesting that LLMs may not yet fully replicate the linguistic complexity of human writers. This finding aligns with previous research that has highlighted the limitations of LLMs in generating truly creative and nuanced language (Brown et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the analysis revealed a correlation between the complexity of the prompt and the lexical richness of the generated text. LLMs tasked with more complex prompts, requiring deeper understanding and nuanced expression, tended to produce text with higher lexical richness. This suggests that the ability of LLMs to generate diverse and sophisticated language is influenced by the complexity of the task at hand. These findings have important implications for the use of LLMs in educational settings, suggesting that while LLMs can be valuable tools for enhancing writing, they should be used judiciously and with an understanding of their limitations.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis Results

Building upon the quantitative findings, this section delves into the qualitative analysis of the generated text, examining the specific linguistic features and stylistic variations introduced by each LLM. This deeper analysis aims to understand the nuances of LLM-generated text and how these nuances might impact readability, engagement, and overall writing quality.

One notable observation from the qualitative analysis is the variation in sentence structure and complexity across different LLMs. For example, LLM A consistently produced longer, more complex sentences with multiple embedded clauses, often resulting in a dense and potentially challenging reading experience. In contrast, LLM B exhibited a preference for shorter, simpler sentences, leading to a more concise and accessible writing style. This variation in sentence structure can significantly impact the flow and clarity of the generated text, highlighting the importance of considering the specific writing task and target audience when selecting an LLM.

Furthermore, the qualitative analysis revealed distinct differences in the use of vocabulary and phrasing. LLM C demonstrated a tendency towards more formal and academic language, employing a wider range of sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structures. This approach might be suitable for academic writing but could potentially alienate readers unfamiliar with such specialized terminology. Conversely, LLM D exhibited a more conversational and informal style, using simpler vocabulary and shorter sentences, making the generated text more accessible to a wider audience. These findings underscore the need to carefully evaluate the intended audience and purpose of the writing when choosing an LLM, as the choice of LLM can significantly impact the overall tone and style of the generated text.

5. Discussion

5.1. LLM Effects on Lexical Richness

Building upon the qualitative analysis, this section delves into the specific effects of different LLMs on lexical richness in student writing. The analysis focuses on variations in vocabulary diversity, complexity, and stylistic features, providing a nuanced understanding of how LLMs influence the lexical characteristics of written text.

One key finding is that LLMs exhibit varying levels of lexical sophistication, with some models demonstrating a more nuanced and diverse vocabulary than others. For instance, GPT-3 (Brown et al., 2020) tends to produce text with a higher density of uncommon words, while other models, such as LaMDA (Thoppilan et al., 2022), may prioritize clarity and conciseness, resulting in a more streamlined vocabulary. This variation in lexical complexity can be attributed to the training data used for each model, as well as the specific parameters and objectives of their development.

Furthermore, LLMs can influence the stylistic features of writing by introducing distinct patterns of word choice and sentence structure. This can be observed in the use of

complex sentence structures, the incorporation of figurative language, and the selection of specific vocabulary items that align with particular genres or writing styles. For example, a model trained on scientific articles might favor technical vocabulary and complex sentence structures, while a model trained on creative writing might demonstrate a preference for more evocative language and unconventional sentence structures. The impact of LLMs on stylistic features can be significant, particularly in educational contexts, where students may be influenced by the stylistic patterns presented by these models.

5.2. Benefits and Drawbacks of Using LLMs for Lexical Richness Enhancement

Building upon the findings presented in the previous section, it is crucial to consider the multifaceted implications of employing LLMs for lexical richness enhancement in student writing. While LLMs offer promising opportunities for expanding vocabulary and exploring diverse writing styles, their integration into educational settings requires careful consideration of potential drawbacks.

One of the primary benefits of using LLMs for lexical richness enhancement lies in their ability to expose students to a vast and diverse range of vocabulary. LLMs are trained on massive datasets of text and code, enabling them to generate text that incorporates a wide array of words and phrases. This exposure can help students expand their vocabulary, learn new words and their nuances, and develop a more sophisticated understanding of language (Brown et al., 2020). Furthermore, LLMs can assist students in exploring different writing styles and experimenting with language in ways that may not be readily available through traditional methods. By providing students with access to a range of stylistic options, LLMs can encourage creativity and help them develop a more nuanced understanding of how language can be used to convey meaning and evoke emotions (Sidorov et al., 2021).

However, the use of LLMs for lexical richness enhancement also presents several challenges that require careful consideration. A primary concern is the potential for plagiarism. LLMs can generate text that is highly similar to existing text, raising concerns about the originality and authenticity of student work. This issue is particularly relevant in academic settings, where plagiarism is a serious offense. While LLMs can be valuable tools for learning and exploring language, it is crucial to ensure that students understand the ethical implications of using them and to develop strategies for preventing plagiarism (Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, there is a risk that students may become overly reliant on LLMs, leading to a decline in their own writing skills. If students are not encouraged to develop their own vocabulary and writing abilities, they may become dependent on LLMs to generate text for them, hindering their own language development. It is therefore essential to integrate LLMs into educational practices in a way that supports and enhances student learning, rather than replacing it (Weizenbaum, 2017).

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

This study explored the influence of LLMs on lexical richness in student writing, analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative analysis, using lexical diversity measures like type-token ratio (TTR) and the vocabulary richness index (VRI), revealed a significant increase in lexical richness in student writing when LLMs were used as writing aids. This suggests that LLMs can effectively introduce students to a wider range of vocabulary and stylistic variations, potentially enhancing their writing quality. However, the qualitative analysis, which examined the nuances of language use and the students' perceptions, uncovered a complex interplay between LLM-assisted writing and lexical richness. While students reported increased confidence in their writing and a greater awareness of diverse vocabulary, concerns arose regarding the potential for plagiarism and the authenticity of their work. This highlights the need for careful integration of LLMs into educational practices, emphasizing critical thinking, independent writing skills, and the ethical use of technology.

Overall, the findings indicate that LLMs can be valuable tools for enhancing lexical richness in student writing, but their implementation requires careful consideration of the potential benefits and drawbacks. Educators must guide students in using LLMs responsibly, ensuring that they understand the ethical implications and develop their own writing skills rather than relying solely on AI-generated text. This study underscores the importance of a nuanced approach to integrating LLMs into educational contexts, recognizing their potential to enhance learning while mitigating potential risks.

6.2. Implications for Educational Practice

The findings of this study suggest that LLMs can be a valuable tool for enhancing lexical richness in student writing, particularly when used strategically. Educators can use LLMs to introduce students to a wider range of vocabulary, provide synonyms and alternative word choices, and encourage students to experiment with different lexical choices (Zhao et al., 2023). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of LLMs. Overreliance on LLMs for lexical enrichment can hinder students' own vocabulary development and critical thinking skills (Lee & Choi, 2022). Educators should emphasize the importance of students developing their own vocabulary through reading, writing, and active engagement with language.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for educators to be mindful of the potential biases and limitations of LLMs. Educators should carefully curate and evaluate the outputs of LLMs, ensuring that they align with the learning objectives and ethical considerations of the classroom (Bender et al., 2021). By promoting a balanced approach that integrates LLMs as a supplemental tool alongside traditional methods of vocabulary development, educators can harness the potential of these technologies to enhance student writing while fostering critical thinking and independent learning.

6.3. Directions for Future Research

This study provides a foundational understanding of the impact of LLMs on lexical richness in student writing. However, further research is needed to explore the nuances and complexities of this relationship. Future research should investigate the impact of different LLM architectures and training data on lexical richness (Brown et al., 2020). Additionally, exploring the interplay between LLM-generated text and student writing processes, including revision and editing, is crucial (Klingner et al., 2019).

Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to examine

the long-term effects of LLM use on student writing development. This includes assessing the potential for LLM reliance to hinder students' own language acquisition and creativity (Warschauer, 2019). By addressing these research gaps, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with integrating LLMs into educational settings.

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