Vocabulary Increase and Collocation Leaning: A corpus-based cross-sectional Study of Chinese Learners of English

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Review

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521

Collocations have been extensively studied in research on writing and second language acquisition, either from a psycholinguistic approach or from a corpus linguistics approach. The research reported in *Vocabulary Increase and Collocation Leaning: A corpus-based cross-sectional Study of Chinese Learners of English* seeks to fill a gap in the current literature about collocations, namely the use of collocations by second language (L2) students across levels of proficiency. Men's study investigates how proficiency development affects the use of verb + noun (VN) collocations. The book is aimed at researchers interested in formulaic language or in language development in L2 writing.

Hayan Men (2018) motivates her research by showing that previous studies focusing on the use of collocations in texts written by native speakers has demonstrated that L1 writing contains large amounts of formulaic language. Therefore, it is important for L2 students to produce these structures appropriately in order to produce fluent texts. When it comes to previous research, Men (2018) argues that other studies have shown that the knowledge of formulaic language does not develop at the same pace as proficiency level. Nevertheless, these studies did not investigate the factors influencing collocation lag in second language acquisition. Taking this into consideration, the researcher seeks to investigate how the use of collocations develops in a corpus of Chinese students. The research questions address issues such as if the use of lexical and delexical verbs influence the use of collocations, if the semantic field of the verbs used influences the correct or incorrect use of collocations, and how the development of VN collocation compares to the development of noun + noun (NN) and adjective + noun (AN) collocations.

The corpus used in this study was the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC), which contains texts from Chinese high school students, non-English majors first and second year university students, non-English majors third and fourth year students, English majors first and second year students, and English majors third and fourth year students. Even though the CLEC represents learners across levels, it is not a longitudinal corpus as all the texts were collected in different sections at the same year. For this study, Men (2018) used three subcorpora from the CLEC: Chinese high school students, and the two subcorpora containing English majors. It is worth noticing that the aim of the study was to investigate the use of collocations across proficiency levels, nevertheless, the learners in CLEC did not have their proficiency

tested. Therefore, it is assumed that high school students have lower proficiency than first and second year undergraduate students and that, in turn, those have lower proficiency than third and fourth year university students. As a reference for the use of collocations in L1 written texts, the author relied on two dictionaries of collocations and on the British National Corpus (BNC).

Chapters 1 to 4 deal with the definition of collocations, literature review and methods. Chapter 1 describes the aims of the study, and Chapter 2 presents the definition of collocations adopted in the research, along with a discussion of the different research approaches used to investigate formulaic language. In Chapter 3, previous studies on how second language learners use collocations are analyzed. Chapter 4 addresses the research design, detailing the corpus used and the methods used for extracting collocations. Chapters 5 to 10 focus on each research question separately, presenting results and discussion of the study.

Chapter 5 addresses the occurrences of VN collocations in the CLEC corpus. The analysis showed that the students used fewer collocations types than previous investigations had reported. An interesting finding discussed in this chapter is that the number of erroneous VN collocations increases with proficiency level. Chapter 6 deals with vocabulary increase and VN collocation production in detail. The results show that as students acquire more lexical verbs within the same semantic domain they make more collocational errors. The author concludes this chapter arguing that as vocabulary increases the occurrence of collocations increases, but also the occurrences of erroneous collocations. Chapter 7 focuses on AN and NN collocations, showing that learners in general produce fewer erroneous AN and NN collocations in comparison to VN collocations. Furthermore, unlike VN collocations, vocabulary increase has a positive effect in AN and NN collocations. Chapter 8 compares the results of the AN, NN and VN collocation production. As expected, VN collocations are more problematic for L2 learners regardless of proficiency levels. The author offers some explanations by suggesting that verbs have more synonyms making it more difficult for learners to select the correct collocation. Chapter 9 explores the effects of L1 in collocation acquisition by looking at the use of congruent and incongruent collocations in English. Surprisingly, the results showed that even though learners used more congruent collocations than non-congruent collocations, they tend to

make more mistakes with congruent collocations. Chapter 10 revisits the results in light of previous research addressing the study's contribution to research on formulaic language.

The results of the study indicate that learners do not notice VN collocations as a unit, but rather as a free choice of words, often replacing the collocational verb with another in the same semantic field. Some of the contributions of the study relate to research on how collocations are stored in the lexicon. It also gives insights for future research on the influence of L1 in the use of collocations. Considering the implications for English language teaching, the author gives suggestions regarding teaching vocabulary in context and raising learners' awareness for VN collocations when teaching new verbs.

This book makes considerable contributions to those interested in collocation development in L2 writing, and its results will likely be used as a reference for researchers interested in collocations containing words from different parts of speech as well as for those interested in L1 transfer in formulaic language. Nevertheless, regarding the methodology of the study, readers should keep in mind that the corpus represents levels of education, which might not necessarily represent levels of proficiency. Furthermore, the researcher did not adopt a cut-off point for collocations, therefore any VN combination in the corpus was considered a collocation, which might have inflated the results.