

Web-Based Collocation Instruction: Implications for L2 Writers

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What is a collocation? A collocation “is all about how likely it is that two words will occur next to each other, or very near each another” (McCarthy, O’Keefe, & Walsch, 2010, p. 28). The following examples illustrate collocations: *strong tea, powerful cars, run a business*.

Most L2 writers have collocation problems (Laufer, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2005). Although non-native and native speakers of English are comparable in terms of a number of produced collocation (fluency) in their compositions, they lack collocation accuracy and use (Nesselhauf, 2003). For example, students write *do a mistake* instead of *make a mistake*, *heavy wind* instead of *strong wind*, and *listen in music* instead of *listen to music*. Most researchers agree that L2 writers often produce unacceptable (non-native like) verb + noun, adjective + noun (lexical collocations), and verb + preposition (grammatical) collocations (Laufer, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2005).

To teach all the collocations that exist in English is almost an impossible task. In order to teach collocations in a classroom setting, researchers examined the effect of learner dictionaries (Laufer, 2011), concordancers (Chan & Liou, 2005), and mobile devices (Yousefzadeh, 2012) on collocation learning. These tools had positive effects on collocation acquisition. However, previous studies did not introduce online tools that would help L2 writers with accurate collocation production in their compositions. To narrow this gap, the study investigated the effect of two online tools on L2 collocation production. It attempted to answer two research questions.

1. Do L2 writers of English make a significant collocation improvement by means of web-based collocation tools?
2. What do L2 writers think of these tools?

There were 30 participants in the study. The participants were level 5 (higher-intermediate) PIE students at NAU who were taking a Writing Lab course when the study took place.

The experimental groups ($n = 19$) learned how to use online tools, JustTheWord and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, and did various collocation exercises using the assigned tool(s). The comparison group ($n = 11$) did the same practice exercises in a traditional way (no tools). After 3-hour training (for each tool), the groups were given their essays and they were asked to fix miscollocations in their essays. The experimental groups used the tool while the comparison group used their background knowledge to correct wrong collocations. Right after the revision stage, the participants answered the questions in the *Quality Review Checklist*, the questionnaire that was administered to learn more about the participants' opinions in using the tools. One-way ANOVA was used to find out the mean differences among three groups. Although statistical significant differences among two experimental groups and a comparison group were not found, L2 writers expressed positive attitudes towards the tools because these tools generated original collocations that helped them fix miscollocations in their essays.

Most participants indicated that they would use the tools for future studies. Majority PIE students are planning to pursue their degrees in the US universities. They need to do assignments that involve writing. The use of these tools would help them improve collocational accuracy and use in their compositions. First, it is known that from 21% (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Friegan, 1991) to 53% (Erman & Warren, 2000) of written academic discourse consist of formulaic language. Second, most learners write essays on a computer, thus accessing online collocation tools while writing on a computer would be more convenient than carrying a hard-copy collocation dictionary.

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