



**BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA
DE PUEBLA**



Facultad de Lenguas

THESIS

**Exploring the use of collocations in texts written
by EFL students at the Language Faculty, BUAP.**

**Submitted to the faculty of languages for the degree of:
LICENCIADA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

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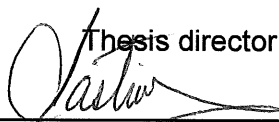
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And is considered worthy of approval in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
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Dedications

I dedicate this investigation to my parents and myself, because thanks to them I have carried out my studies, they have supported me all this time encouraging me and wishing me good luck in my life. They are part of this investigation because I have been doing this thesis thinking of them to present them when it is finished.

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*Con la mayor gratitud por los esfuerzos realizados para que yo lograra
terminar mi carrera profesional siendo para mí la mejor herencia.*

A mi madre que es el ser más maravilloso de todo el mundo.

*Gracias por el apoyo moral, tu cariño y comprensión que desde niña me has
brindado, por guiar mi camino y estar junto a mí en los momentos más difíciles.*

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore the use of collocations in 50 texts written by EFL students with an A2 level (CEFR) majoring in English Language Teaching at the Language Faculty, BUAP. The purpose of this study was to determine what types of collocations were most frequently used by these students and to identify any problematic areas in the use of collocations. In order to fulfil the objectives of this study, the following research questions were posed:

- How are collocations used by 3rd level students of English as a foreign language in descriptive texts?
- What are the most frequently used collocation in such texts?
- What are the most problematic areas that are present in such texts?

The main theoretical framework and categorization of collocations was based on Lewis (1993, 2000) and Sinclair (1991). The methodology followed in this investigation has both a qualitative and a quantitative side (Creswell, 2010), following a text analysis approach. The preliminary results seem to indicate that the most frequently used type of collocations used was that of 'fixed expressions'. Examples illustrating the results of this study will be provided. This study intends to shed some light in the use of collocations in English as foreign language writing.

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

According to scholars such as Davies and Pearse (2000), Harmer, (1978), Grabe and Kaplan, (1996), in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), one of the most difficult skills to master by learner is writing. Writing in a foreign language entails that students should be able to adequately use grammar, lexis and syntax. Often, one of the problems that students' writings present is the problematic use of collocations. This phenomenon becomes even more interesting and complex when the language students are writing is a foreign language. Many questions come to mind about the strategies that students are using when writing and of the role being played by their first and foreign language instructions in writing. Therefore, this study will focus on the use of collocations in Lengua Meta LM3 students' writings. This study tries to shed some light on how students handle collocations in their texts. The desire to understand what occurs in the mind of the student writers is a commonly felt concern. This is true when faced with reading students' papers and trying to assess a set of ideas that guides their writing aside from the writing instruction they have received. Relevant literature in the field of writing includes cognitive processes that cannot be observed through the written product alone.

Writing starts with a dialogue as speaking does, for it is also directed towards an audience; and even though the dialogue between writer and audience is, in this case, distanced (Davies & Frankel.2003) writing still forms the context in

which words has meaning and strategies for comprehension to operate. Writing is also a method of representing language in visual or tactile form. It uses sets of symbols to represent the sounds of speech, and may also have symbols for such things as punctuation and numerals. Writing connects people across the time, space and culture. Because of the influence of writing, individuals can learn from yesterday, gain knowledge about today and design for tomorrow.

Collocation has become a challenging issue not only for second language (L2) learners, but also for language researchers (Schmitt, 2010). To successfully acquire vocabulary in a target language (TL), in addition to mastering a good number of useful words and their principal meanings, learners also need to be capable of possible and likely word combinations, referred to as collocation (Firth, 1957). Collocation can also be defined as “items that occur physically together or have stronger chances of being mentioned together” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 170). In a similar vein, Lewis (1997) gives a definition of collocation as “the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency” (p. 8). Collocation also exists in statistically significant manners (Lewis, 2000). On the other hand, Hill (2000) observes that collocation deals with word combinations that are predictable. Collocations have recently received increased attention in applied linguistic studies; however, still relatively little is known about the way in which collocations are used by speakers of foreign languages. As the authors mentioned above maintain, there are many confusions or errors at the moment of using collocations, either in speaking or writing by non-native people, especially those who are learning English as a

second language. Thus, Collocation is one of the most problematic areas in second language learning and it seems that if one wants to improve his or her communication in another language should improve his or her collocation competence first.

Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), require solid collocational knowledge of English in order to effectively utilize vocabulary in the TL (Phoocharoensil, 2010; Schmitt, 2000). Hill (2000) suggested some reasons why collocations should be emphasized in an EFL classroom. Firstly, vocabulary choice is often predictable in such a way that a word uttered by a speaker could make the listener expect a range of possible word partners. For instance, the verb *drink* is supposed to be followed by a drinkable kind of liquid, e.g. *water, milk, lemonade*, etc. rather than inedible liquid, e.g. *engine oil*, or even solid food, e.g. *bread, rice, meat*, etc. For this reason, an awareness of collocation predictability should be raised for EFL students. Secondly, collocations in English are of enormous size, taking up almost 70% of what is really spoken and written in authentic English. Consequently, collocation teaching seems to benefit EFL learners to a great extent. Another reason why collocations are viewed as important concerns its role as a facilitator of the human thinking process, which allows more successful, fluent communication. According to Hill (2000) and Wray (2000), whereas native English speakers recognize multi-word units with ease, EFL learners with limited exposure to L2 English often process L2 word-by-word owing to a lack of a vast repertoire of ready-made or formulaic language like collocations. Thus, adequate collocation knowledge seems to substantially expedite learners' ability to process L2 (Moon,

1997). This idea gains support from Kuiper, Columbus & Schmitt (2009), who remarked that formulaic sequences offer processing efficiency since single memorized units composed of a string of words are processed more quickly and easily than word sequences generated creatively. In a similar way, Conklin and Schmitt (2008) indicated an advantage in reading by non-native speakers who read formulaic sequences faster than non-formulaic ones.

Second language learners have always struggled with the lexical aspect of the language in contrast to grammatical and phonological aspects, where a great deal of research effort has been allocated, lexis have not aroused the same degree of interest. Collocation patterns, the cornerstone of every language, instantly recognizable by native speakers, are what second language learners strive to acquire besides facing the challenge of putting together the right chunks. Relying on their native language, making a desperate bid to convey their message, second language learners fail to communicate effectively, and the dearth of what is considered to be the backbone of the language leads to collocation errors and consequently the breakdown of comprehension, since the equivalent lexical items do not always convey the same sense in two languages for various reasons including cultural differences in the vocabulary of every language. This study focuses on an exploration of the use of collocations in writings of students of target language III from the Faculty of Languages at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) will allow us to see how collocations are used in the students' writings as well as possible problems.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the present study is to explore collocations in students' writings of target language III from the Faculty of Languages BUAP. For this reason, 45 descriptive texts were collected and analysed. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology followed in order to obtain the data. Chapter 4 will describe in detail the results obtained.

1.2.1 Justification

This study will shed light in the use of collocations in English as foreign language writing. Hopefully, it will make a contribution to the area of English teaching and learning. At the same time, it may raise awareness in the specific problematic areas that Mexican students might face, in this way, both students and teachers may have a parameter on how to teach and learn the appropriate use of collocation.

1.3 Research questions

In order to adequately deal with the above stated problem, the following research questions will be addressed.

- How are collocations used by 3rd level students of English as a foreign language in descriptive texts?
- What are the most frequently used collocation in such texts?

- What are the most problematic areas that are present in such texts?

1.4 Significance of the study

Since communication is the key when learning a foreign language, it is essential that students know the use of collocations. This particular study on writing skill intends to provide some help to researchers, teachers and students involved in the foreign language learning and teaching process. Based on the results will be obtained, this study may serve as a guidelines for teachers and students on the adequate or inadequate use of collocations

1.5 Methodology

The methodology was based on text analysis. The texts were collected after obtaining the teacher's permission. First, the teacher instructed me to ask for a descriptive text. Once we had all this rightly, the texts were collected, read and codified focusing on the use of collocations. The focus of this study was on 45 descriptive texts. Collocations were identified and coded (see chapter 3 for a complete description) thus, students were asked to describe their last summer in one page as a maximum.

This study is structured as follows: in chapter 2, I provide an overview of the literature dealing with writing, collocations and some problems students may have. In chapter 3, the methodology followed in this thesis is described. In chapter 4, the results of the analysis of the data are provided in detail. Finally, in chapter 5, I

describe the conclusions obtained from the results of the study; I also mention the limitations of this investigation as well as directions for further research.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

Writing has been being a difficult task to develop for students in any language, even for those people who have studied for many years, this happens because writing asks for some very important skills that for a student is hard to develop in a short time. Some of those skills are: Use of correct grammar, having a very good range of vocabulary, correct use of punctuation, using the rhetorical conventions of layout correctly, e.g. in letters. Other skills include using spelling accurately, using a range of sentence structures, linking ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic, and developing and organizing the content clearly and convincingly (Hedge, 1998, p.8). Thus, we have that if a written text does not contain at least several of the skills mentioned above, writing could not be successful; the message could be interpreted differently from what the author wants.

2.1 The four skills

In language teaching Davies and Pearse (2000) write that communication is usually divided into four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. From those ones, listening and reading are receptive skills, and speaking and writing are

productive skills. They say that there was a time when the terms 'passive' and 'active' were often used instead of 'receptive' and 'productive'. As we can realize in EFL, the productive skills are more 'communicative' than the receptive skills, therefore, we can assume that they are the basis of the learning process itself. We know that everyone likes quick results we can see (realities), an example would be that learners produce lots of sentences in English, but children on the other side, begin to learn their mother tongue by listening before they speak, the same happens when immigrants or foreign residents learn a second language. Thus, both learners and children of a second language or foreign language should have a wide exposure to the language, which helps them learn the language and develop communication skills. Outside the classroom, students often integrate the skills or switch from one to another, which is the reason why it is important to insist in this natural integration of skills in the classroom as much as possible.

As a general knowledge about the four skills we have that between spoken and written language, writing is more grammatically complete than speech. While spoken communication is supported by tone of voice, gesture, and context, however, a written text has to communicate with the language itself (Davies & Pearse, 2000). This usually means more carefully constructed sentences and a greater range of vocabulary and grammar. As a consequence, writing may often be more complex than speech. On the other hand, readers can reread difficult topics, and writers can plan and edit various drafts of a text. In reading comprehension, reading has a lot in common with listening. The written text is permanent, which may make it easier to understand. As with listening, the expectations and world

knowledge, as well as the knowledge of the language help us make sense of the text. Learners should be discouraged from reading, or translating slowly word by word Davies &Pearse (2000). A complete reading comprehension requires more knowledge of the language and higher level reading skills. So, reading in itself helps to develop the skills and language knowledge necessary for an efficient comprehension. But most learners will read outside the classroom only if they have interesting texts available at their level.

2.2 Writing

Writing is probably the language skill used by most people. It is also a skill usually learnt formally at school, and not handled well by many people, even in their mother tongue (L1). It involves low-level skills (handwriting or typing, spelling, constructing grammatical sentences, punctuating) and high-level cognitive skills (gathering ideas, organizing and sequencing, structuring, drafting, and editing), Davies & Pearse (2000). Finally, the integrating skills involved in writing reflect natural use of the language, and it is useful in pedagogy. Most teaching of a specific skill involves the use of other skills. Whole lesson plans can integrate skills around a single theme or topic. Group projects also involve the use of all the skills. Integrated skills lessons and projects can be very interesting, enjoyable, and satisfying for the learners Davies and Pearse (2000). In my opinion, the integration of the four skills as Davies and Pearse have been saying above is very important in English language teaching (ELT), since that integration helps in the good

development of students' writing. Every learner in any moment will have to integrate the skills in only one task. Such as in the case of team work, every learner has to speak, giving some ideas or points about a topic, which was given by the teacher before, while the rest is listening up, then all students will have to write the ideas said and then read them, first by themselves in their team and after to the whole group.

Referring only to writing, as Rosen (1981) points out, writing is detached from the wide range of expressive possibilities in speech. A writer cannot use all the devices a speaker use to communicate with the others. For example: the gestures, the use of body language, the facial expressions, the level and tone of voice, the stress and hesitations. A speaker can backtrack, or clarify ideas, agree, or disagree, argument if something do not like, say what he or she prefers, a speaker could also be freer than a writer, since a writer has to compensate for all these disadvantages. Davies and Frankel (2003) say that some people believe that written language is superior to spoken language, because they believe it is more grammatical, has richer vocabulary and is more elegant and polished than speech, but those same people could say the same opposite; speech is the first form of language because it appeared before of writing, and written language is not a good representation of the speech. Devices such as punctuation, italics and underlining, do not totally convey the shades of meaning that one can express in speech through pauses, stress, intonation and tone of voice. Finally they do not believe either of the above cases is valid. Their view is that neither spoken nor written

discourse is superior. In my opinion I think written and spoken language are simply different ways of communication, one is not better than the other, both take a very important place in the language, since they give a great of help in any acquisition of language.

2.3 Writing in ELT

As it is known, a piece of writing is a compendium of rhetorical, lexical and other linguistic devices which, together, make up a unit that communicates and develops an idea. However, in order to be able to express their ideas accurately in writing, language learners need to manage basic skills and strategies Grabe and Kaplan, (1996).

Writing requires the manipulation of many complex structural and rhetorical dimensions,” among which they distinguish the following: Syntactic structures, Semantic senses and mappings, Cohesion signaling, Genre and organizational structuring to support coherence and interpretations, Lexical forms and relations, Stylistic and register dimensions of text structure, Non-linguistic knowledge bases, including “world knowledge” (p.62).

We also have that one approach to writing is to look at several facts of writing and to analyze the features of written texts. This will tell us something about what students have to produce. It is possible to build up a list of the skills writers need. It includes: Getting the grammar right, Having a range of vocabulary, Punctuating meaningfully, using the conventions of layout correctly, e.g. in letters, spelling accurately, using a range of sentence structures, linking ideas and information

across sentences to develop a topic and developing and organizing the content clearly and convincingly, Tricia Hedge (1998, p.8). I agree that all of the skills that a good writer needs, and which are mentioned above are necessary to make a good writing. I believe that to write something meaningful is harder than to speak, relating to grammar and cognitive knowledge. When we write we have to aware about what we want to say to the other one, and how we can do it to make a good message. I add that those skills have to be taught at school correctly, because we always need a supervisor who can help us.

Each dimension involves a series of skills whose acquisition requires the application of strategies. According to Grabe & Kaplan (1996) this is an important and compulsory part of second language teaching and learning that needs to be carefully regarded by teachers. This means that teachers should have a clear idea about which writing skills their students need to learn, when they need to learn them, how they need to learn them, and which strategies will help them to become proficient writers. Understanding writing instruction in this way implies getting to know students' writing needs beforehand and tracking them throughout the process in order to have a more meaningful and productive writing teaching and learning process. The role of grammar and vocabulary in second and foreign language learning, and the importance they should be given when teaching writing have been highly discussed in second language education. Discussions around which one is more important or which one should be emphasize in language teaching have aroused much controversy.

According to Graves (1984, cited in Grabe & Kaplan 1996),

In most schools, writing is given little time, and students are not encouraged to write. Teachers, typically do not know how to teach writing and seldom write anything themselves; even less frequently do teachers model writing in the classroom and share the writing with students for their comments and feedback (p. 96).

Thus, depriving students from the opportunity to share and reflect upon this process may bring negative consequences in elementary school students' writing, which needs to be properly guided for accuracy. On the other hand, there are teachers who make students write compositions without giving them the time to plan, structure, and improve their writing, which may be counterproductive for the development of their written expression, especially at elementary school levels. As an alternative, process writing has been proposed as one of the most effective approaches for teaching writing. It is a reflective multi-step method (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) that takes students to plan, direct, revise, and improve their writing before the final correction of their tutors. (Grabe & Kaplan 1996, p.98) propose this approach as a "wholly positive innovation allowing teachers and students more meaningful interaction and more purposeful writing.

2.4 Text analysis and collocations

According to Davies and Fraenkl (2003), a text "refers to the linguistic product of discourse – that is, a coherent and cohesive stretch of language" (p. 123). Texts

occur in language in use in spoken or written forms and are produced for a communicative purpose. On the other hand, a corpus is a collection of texts that may be computer-readable and which represent spoken and / or written usage. Corpora may be small or large including millions of texts. The study and interpretation of these texts, which may be the products of spoken or written discourse (See Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, is known as text analysis. This project is based on the examination of a small corpus of text and the focus of its analysis are collocations.

Collocations are words that usually go together or collocate. Sinclair (1991) mentions that when two or more words of different frequencies collocate significantly collocation has a different value in the description of each of the two words. He goes on to say that “if word *a* is twice as frequent as word *b*, then each time they occur together is twice as important for *b* than it is for *a*. This is because that particular event accounts for twice the proportion of the occurrence of *b* than of *a*. Firth (as cited in Lewis, 2000) defined collocation as “the company words keep” that is to say, their relationship with other words, Another definition might be “the way words combine in predictable ways” since when we think of the large number of words in English, the number of that huge quantity of combinations comes into many millions. Lewis also says that the first and most important fact about the nature of collocation is the pure numbers of individual collocations that exist in the English. Past assessments of the number of individual words known by an educated native speaker pale into insignificance when compared with the total number of items – words. Expressions, idioms, and collocations which exist in the

mental lexicon, must dominate all our methodological thinking. The mental lexicon of any individual is huge, consisting of a vast repertoire of learned phrases of varying degrees of fixed words. Thus, within the mental lexicon, collocation is the most powerful force in the creation and comprehension of all naturally-occurring text. I agree with Lewis in that the nature of collocation is the pure numbers of individual collocations since our vocabulary is enormous, we can construct or disappear words, invent, fix, or add letters to a word to create more, etc., thus, collocation occupies a big place into vocabulary.

2.6 Why is collocation important in ELT?

Lewis (2000, p. 53) provides the following list of reasons to teach collocations in the ELT context.

1. The lexicon is not arbitrary. This refers to the fact that “we do not speak or write as if language were one huge substitution table with vocabulary items merely filling slots in grammatical structures. To an important extent vocabulary choice is predictable.”
2. Predictability: When the teacher can predict the use of collocations to help learners.
3. The size of the phrasal mental lexicon: The issue of predictability is enormous, two, three or even more than five collocations can make a huge percentage of all naturally-occurring in text, spoken or written.
4. The role of memory: “the most crucial element in a learner’s acquisition of a lexical item is the number of times it is heard or read in a context where it is

at least partially understood”. It is also known that it is more important to hear or heard an item than to use it.

5. Fluency: Collocations allow us to think more quickly, communicative and more efficiently. “The main difference between native and non-native speakers is that the former have met more for English and so can recognize and produce these ‘ready-made chunks’, which enable them to process and produce language at a much faster rate.
6. Complex ideas are often expressed lexically: Complex ideas are difficult to express in a complex language, this is not because of a convoluted grammar but because it is lexical complex noun phrases frequently made of supposedly ‘easy’ words.
7. Collocation makes thinking easier: Collocations allows us to name complex ideas quickly, we can control the ideas without using all our brain space just to focus on the form of words.
8. Pronunciation is integral: If the learners create much of what they say from individual words, so their stress, pronunciation and intonation can be difficult for the listener. Thus, to knowing a large number of collocations is that if the learners learn the stress pattern of a phrase as a whole, their stress and intonation will be better. It is worth mentioning that this study focuses on written work.
9. Recognizing chunks is essential for acquisition: “Teachers should read texts aloud in class so that students hear the text correctly chunked”. Students do not recognize the chunks because they find unseen reading difficult – they read the every word as if it were separate from every other word.

Lewis (1993) describes collocation as the way individual words co-occur with others. He refers to fixed collocations as a kind of poly-word phenomenon. Free collocation, on the other hand, are entirely novel and therefore lie towards the creative, grammatical competence-based pole of language.

2.7 Collocations in writing

According to Lewis (2000, p. 80) writing should be taught as an integrated skill with reading. He says also that teachers can review with their students a list of collocations and expression that are important to express ideas relevant to the topic when they give writing assignments based on readings. The authors points out that

if you were going to have your students write an essay about the pros and cons of child day care, you might first want to do a pre-writing exercise and in this context, note on the board and discuss the meaning of expressions like: physical well-being, emotional well-being, quality time, high turnover of pre-school teachers, child-care workers, working outside the home, double-income family, woman in the workforce, teacher-child ratios, etc.

2.8 Types of collocations

According to Lewis (2000), “collocation is the way in which words co-occur in natural text in statistically significant ways” (p. 132). Lewis (2000, p. 134) classifies collocations as follows: lexical and grammatical collocations. Some authors

distinguish between lexical collocations such as *suggest an alternative, an evasive answer*. So refer to the above said lexical collocations combine two equal lexical components (open class words).

Grammatical collocations: Several authors distinguish to grammatical collocation such as *aware of, step into*. Thus, grammatical collocation combines a lexical word (a noun, a verb or an adjective) with a grammatical word (one open class word and one closed class word). Thus, it is better to record phrases such as *put the meeting off until...*, so they include both lexical and grammatical words which are often used together.

Lewis (2000) distinguishes 20 categories of collocations in terms of grammar that are regularly found together.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Fixed expressions | 11. Multi-word prepositional phrase |
| 2. V + N Note: look at collocations with 'spend' | 12. Phrasal verb |
| 3. Adj + N | 13. Adjective + Preposition |
| 4. Verb + Noun | 14. Compound noun |
| 5. Noun + Noun | 15. Binomial |
| 6. Verb + Adverb | 16. Trinomial |
| 7. Adverb + Adjective | 17. Fixed phrase |
| 8. Verb + Adjective + Noun | 18. Incomplete fixed phrase |
| 9. Noun + Verb | 19. Fixed expression |
| 10. Discourse marker | 20. Semi-fixed expression |
| | 21. Part of proverb |

22. Part of quotation

Marton (1977, p.40-1) but the notion of conventional syntagm finds its full dimension only when it is considered contrastively, i.e. when the native language of the learner and his target language are taken into consideration. Real learning problems are caused by these syntagms which are, comparatively speaking, lexically non-congruent, or, in other words, by those on which there is no direct translational equivalence between their corresponding elements.

Regarding collocations, learners seem to rely on a 'hypothesis of transferability', since the majority of collocational errors can be traced to L1 influenced. See the next cases,

- a. *drive a bookshop* (from Polish *kierowac sklepem*) instead of *run a bookshop*.
- b. *make attention at* (from French *faire attention á*) instead of *pay attention to*.
- c. *win money* (from Bulgarian *спечели пари*) instead of *make money*.
- d. *finish a conflict* (from German *einen Konflikt beenden*) instead of *resolve a conflict*.

2.9 Problems with grammar rules

As we know the grammatical rules of a language subconsciously, we can already create an infinite number of sentences. However, while some rules are fairly straightforward, others seem to be terribly complex, and some grammatical patterning seems to have escaped perfect description so far. Harmer (1978) says

that the easiest rules to explain it is the use of the s morpheme on the third person of the present simple, since we always add s with the pronouns *he*, *she* and *it*. This is a straightforward rule, but it needs qualifying immediately we can express again by saying that we add s to all verbs for the third person singular of the present simple unless they are modal verbs (must, can, will, should), thus ruling out *he musts*. So a simple rule has become slightly less simple.

Swan, one of the most widely-used pedagogic grammars suggests a number of measures of a good rule (Swan, 1994). These include ‘simplicity’ (though we have seen how this may cause problems,) ‘truth’ (because some rules are more ‘true’ than others), ‘clarity’ (because rules that are unclear help nobody), and ‘relevance’ (because there are some things which a teacher or students probably does not really need to know).

2.10 EFL errors: classification focusing on internal learning processes

Corder (1981) dichotomized between *error* (a failure in competence, a systemic fault) and *mistake* (a flaw in performance in the syntactic or lexical level). Finally, certain kinds of difference between two languages seem to cause greater difficulty than others; this in turn has prompted the concept of “hierarchy of difficulty” Richards (1974) had already taken a non-contrastive approach to error analysis by seeing errors as traceable to transfer and interference. He classified errors as being *interlingual*, *intralingual*, and *developmental*. Way before Richards, Lado (1957) had come to the conclusion that interlingual errors were inevitable and resulted from interference. Richards, however, pointed out that errors are due not

solely to interference, but to the structure of English, which is new to the learner, and to the strategies used to teach and to learn. Richards and others equated intralingual errors with developmental errors, i.e. errors which illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypotheses about the English language.

Thus, we have that if an EFL learner is taking part in formal instruction, some errors will be a direct result of misunderstanding caused by faulty teaching or materials. For example, the distinction between two forms may not be clearly explained and as a consequence the learner usually confuses them. Alternatively, one form or pattern may be overemphasized or overpracticed, so that the learner produces it in inappropriate contexts. As an example of this, Littlewood (quoted in Jack Richards (1971) suggests that many teachers or materials place special emphasis on the present continuous form in English; it is a special instance of *overgeneralization* errors.

According to the relevant literature, by looking at the kinds of errors that EFL learners make, we have evidence for three main internal learning processes: a. *transfer of rules* from the mother-tongue, b. *redundancy reduction* by omitting elements and c. *overgeneralization* of foreign language rules.

a. Transfer of rules

This is the first kind of error due to transfer of rules from the mother-tongue causing what is called 'interference', existing habits or rules prevent correct speech from becoming established. Transfer errors are 'interlingual' since they come from the

interaction between the first and second or foreign language. In the case of transfer, EFL learners use their previous mother-tongue experience as a means of organizing the foreign language data. So, both of them are seen as expressions of the same underlying strategy of applying previous knowledge to the foreign language learning task; they can also both be seen as forms of the second main kind of error, also called 'simplification'.

b. Redundancy reduction

This is a tendency by EFL learners, to eliminate many items, either by ignorance or intensively, which are redundant to conveying the intended message. For instance, in the case of a learner of English language as foreign we may meet utterances, such as: "No understand", "Is man", etc. It is rather a simplified code of communication or reduced language systems used by foreign language learners especially in earlier stages of the learning process.

c. Overgeneralization

In the foreign language rules (and where belongs the majority of 'intralingual' errors) the learner while trying constructing rules which predict how the different items will behave, sometimes, his/her predictions are wrong, probably for one of two main reasons: a. an exception to the general rule or because b. a new category and rule must be constructed. In either case, the learner's initial error is due to overgeneralization of the rule which causes the wrong prediction. In the case of overgeneralization, it is his/her previous knowledge of the foreign language that the learner uses.

In fact, it may be part of the normal psychological reality of foreign language learning that the three above processes, *transfer of rules*, *redundancy reduction* and *overgeneralization*, work together and reinforce each other (Littlewood, 1984, p30). Some errors will probably never disappear entirely even at later stages of foreign language learning. Such errors are often described as 'fossilized', meaning that they have become permanent features of the learner's speech. Obvious examples are the pronunciation errors which form part of the 'foreign accent'. It is also here dominant the role of the mother-tongue since it may influence learning in determining which errors fossilize. A further suggestion is that fossilization is most likely to occur when a learner realizes (subconsciously) that the error does not hinder him/her in satisfying his or her communicative needs.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter will present the methodology used in this investigation. First, the context of the study will be described. Second, the objects of study will be discussed. I will also present the data collection procedure and the sample texts collected (corpus). Finally, the method of analysis will be discussed. The methodology followed a guided sample, since 45 students were selected to make a written whose texts were analyzed and codified with the purpose of gathering information about how and what frequency collocations are used with.

3.1 Mixed methods

Because of the nature of this study, a mixed method approach was used (Creswell, 2003). Mixed methods research has expanded lately due to the development and perceived legitimacy of quantitative and qualitative research in social and human sciences. The nature of mixed methods: Because mixed methods research is relatively new in the social and human sciences as a distinct research approach it is useful to convey in a proposal, a basic definition and description of the approach that might include: The need for extensive data, the time-intensive nature of analyzing text and numeric data, and the requirement for the researcher to be familiar with quantitative and qualitative forms of research.

Some types of mixed methods strategies are taken into account as: *Criteria for choosing a strategy, Implementation, Priority, Integration, and A theoretical Perspective*. Data collection procedures: It is important to identify the sampling strategies and the approaches used to establish validity of the data: Identify and be specific about the type of data, both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data often involve random sampling: each individual has an equal probability of being selected. In qualitative data, purposeful sampling is used so that individuals are selected because they have experience the central phenomenon and relate the procedures specifically to the visual model.

Data analysis and validation procedures: The data analysis in mixed methods research relates to the type of research strategy chosen for the procedures. Thus, in a proposal, the procedures need to be identified within the design. However, analysis occurs within the quantitative and qualitative approach. Another aspect of data analysis to describe in a proposal is the series of steps taken to check the validity of both the quantitative data and the qualitative findings. In this case, the quantitative part consisted of counting the number of occurrences of collocations; whereas an extensive qualitative text analysis of collocations was carried out.

3.2 Context

The context of this study is the Language Faculty of the BUAP. The BUAP is a public university which offers a major in English Language Teaching. This major includes five levels of target language that are compulsory to all students. Two groups took part in this investigation. The groups whose texts were analyzed belong to the third level of target language. Students' age range from 19-22. There were in the first group 18 females and 8 males, in the second group there were 13 females and 7 males in total. On the other hand, most of these students belong to a low to medium socio-economic class.

3.3 Data collection procedure

A corpus of 45 written texts was collected. To obtain the data I had to look for all those teachers who were giving target language III. Then, I chose two of them to obtain permission of asking students to write a one page text as maximum. I also asked teachers for the type of text students could write. The text was descriptive and thus the professors gave me a date to go to the classroom and assign students the written task. This procedure took two days to get the data completed.

3.4 Instrument

Because of the nature of this study I made a table to facilitate the counting of collocations that I was finding along the analysis of the texts. The table will also help to identify the most frequent collocations there were, and thus facilitate the analysis.

3.5 Method of analysis

Color coding was used to identify the types of collocation. Type 1: Fixed expressions and verb plus (V + N) were highlighted in yellow. Type 2: Verb + Prep. (VP) were highlighted in pink. Type 3: Adjective + Noun (A+N) were highlighted in blue. This system allowed me to distinguish the types of collocations in a more effective way. For the purposes of this study, the most salient types of collocations were analyzed. These types were: fixed expressions, verb + noun, adjective + noun and verb + preposition as it is shown on the chart in the following chapter. Typing mistakes were not considered as errors.

Chapter IV: Findings

This chapter presents the results of the analysis according to the four categories described in the previous chapter. The findings present the collocations most frequently used as well as the misused. I also present a table where collocations are classified in categories. Each category contains the collocations most frequently used by the students, the number of occurrences that that collocation occurred and the some notes, where I wrote the mistakes found and I explain why. Due to space constraints, collocations that occurred less than three times will not be discussed.

4.1 Collocations of type V + N and fixed expressions

In this category collocation of the type V + N is included into the collocation type 1: *fixed expression*, as classified by Lewis (2000). Thus, the collocation *spend time* belonging to the type V + N was the most frequently used by the students with 16 occurrences. None of these collocations was misused. Within this category, we found the collocations '*spend a couple of days, spend the entire day and spend*

one hour' on four occasions. It is worth noting that on three occasions, they were misused. The sentences containing these mistakes say: 'my brother spended a couple of days with us', 'we spended the entire day watching movies' and 'So, we spended one hour and a half. A possible explanation for this type of error may be the overgeneralization of the –ed endings in the Simple Past Tense.

4.2 Collocation type 2: Verb + Preposition

In relation to this category, V + P as classified by Lewis (2000) the collocation 'go *to*' was the most frequently used with 68 occurrences and without any error. An example where this type of collocation was found says 'in the second day we went to visit all the lakes that are in Chiapas'. Nevertheless, 'Go *with*' was the second collocation most used with 11 occurrences and none error found. The example of this type of collocation says 'I used to went with my cousins to play basketball'. On the other hand, I have also the least used which are '*play with*', '*wait for*', '*work in*', '*close to*', '*try to*', '*cook for*', and '*travel for*' with 2 occurrences each one. An example of one of these ones is 'I spent \$4000 to go and live in a nice department very close to the beach'. It is worth mentioning that no mistakes were made in this category.

4.3 Collocation type 3: Adjective + Noun

The collocation belong to the type 3: Adj + N as classified by Lewis (2000) '*best friend*' and *last summer* were the most used, having *best friend* 5 occurrences without any misused and *last summer* with 3 occurrences with no error found also.

An example of one of these ones says 'I enjoyed with my 2 best friends'. For more information see chart 4.1

Chart 4.1 Summarize of the most common collocations encountered in the students' written texts. On the right hand side, notes are placed in order to indicate the misuses found.

Fixed expressions where the collocations V + N are included	Number of occurrences	Notes: Misuse and the number of occurrences.
Spend time (V+N)	16	
Watch TV	11	
Take classes	8	
Take subjects	5	
Spend all day/entire day/couple of days/evenings, one hour (V+N)	4	Misused 'spended' (3)
Do exercise (V+N)	3	
Spend a lot of time	3	
Verb + Prep.	Number of occurrences	Notes
Go to	68	
Go with	11	
Stay in	8	
Stay at	5	
Arrive to	5	
Decide to	4	
Stay with	4	
Participate in	4	
Want to	3	
Be with	3	
Work with	3	
Be at	3	
Talk with	3	
Study at	3	
Return to	3	
Adjective + Noun	Number of occurrences	Notes

Best friend	5	
Last summer	3	
Important things	3	
Amazing idea	2	
Amazing painting/vacation	2	
Good time/experience	2	
Eldest brother	2	
Typical food	2	
Summer classes	3	

Along the analysis of the category type 2 was found that the collocation *go to* that belongs to type 2 was the most frequently used. One of the reasons to this fact maybe due to the kind of text was asked to write, since it was descriptive, thus students just wrote the simplest adjectives, prepositions, verbs, and nouns necessary to describe their last summer.

In relation to the type 1, Verb + Noun we have that the collocation *spend time* had three misuses, although this error was more grammatical than in the use of the collocation. This could have happened because of the overgeneralization of the use of –ed ending in the Simple Past Tense.

It is important to mention that the errors found in the use of collocations consisted of grammar mistakes. Specifically, they consisted of overgeneralizations of the –ed endings in the use of irregular verbs as mentioned in the previous chapter (e.g. *spended time*).

In the chapter IV the conclusions of the findings will be presented.

Chapter V: Conclusions

In this chapter, category per category's conclusions including their findings from the analysis made will be discussed. Limitations for the study will be also taken into account, since these ones took a very important place in the investigation. On the other hand, directions for further research are mentioned too.

5.1 Context

As we have seen in chapter 1, Davies and Pearse (2000), Harmer, (1978), Grabe and Kaplan, (1996), in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), one of the most difficult skills to master by learners is writing. So, writing in a foreign language entails that students should be able to adequately use grammar, lexis and syntax. Often, one of the problems that students' writings present is the problematic use of collocations. This phenomenon becomes even more interesting and complex when the language students are writing is a foreign language.

(Schmitt, 2010) points out that collocation has become a challenging issue not only for L2 learners, but also for language researchers. Lewis (1997) gives a definition of collocation as "the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain

words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency” (p. 8). Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), require solid collocational knowledge of English in order to effectively utilize vocabulary in the TL (Phoocharoensil, 2010; Schmitt, 2000).

Thus, the purpose of this investigation was to explore collocations in students’ writings of target language III from the Faculty of Languages BUAP.

5.2 Conclusions

Taking into account the methodology was carried out in this investigation, we have as conclusions for the three categories that:

5.2.1 In the first category of collocations that belongs to the type1: V + N and fixed expressions: the collocation *spend time* was the most frequently used by the students with 16 occurrences. None of these collocations was misused. Within this category, we found the collocations ‘*spend a couple of days, spend the entire day and spend one hour*’ on four occasions. It is worth noting that on three occasions, they were misused. The sentences containing these mistakes say: ‘my brother spended a couple of days with us’, ‘we spended the entire day watching movies’ and ‘So, we spended one hour and a half. A possible explanation for this type of error may be the overgeneralization of the –ed endings in the Simple Past Tense

5.2.2 For the second category of collocation type 2: Verb + Preposition we have that the collocation ‘go to’ was the most frequently used with 68 occurrences and without any error.

5.2.3 About the *collocation type 3*: Adjective + Noun: '*best friend*' and *last summer* were the most used, having *best friend* 5 occurrences without any misused and *last summer* with 3 occurrences with no error found also. It is worthy that no errors were found in this category, maybe because students needed to write a more complex text.

5.3 Research Questions

Along the analysis of the study the questions research were answered:

How are collocations used by 3rd level students of English as a foreign language in descriptive texts? In this first question we have that in general, students made adequate use of collocations in their descriptive texts.

What are the most frequently used collocations? The most frequently used types of collocations were: v + prep., v + noun.

What are the most problematic areas that are present in such texts? Very few errors were found in the use of collocations. They consisted of grammar mistakes.

5.4 Limitations of the study

About the limitations that there were in the investigation, first of all, a small corpus was analyzed, since it was focused on two groups with a maximum of 30 students each. For this reason generalizations cannot be drawn. Another limitation was that only one type of text was analyzed, which could have been one cause for students

used the simplest collocations and there were not errors. We have also that the study was carried out in one level and one context. For this reason, it is suggested that this kind of study is conducted more constantly, with an analysis in a higher or lower level.

5.5 Directions for further research

To have fuller information about the use of collocations by students, it would be necessary to analyze larger corpora of texts, to analyze different types of texts, and look into different contexts and levels.

5.6 Implications

Since communication is the key when learning a foreign language, it is essential that students know the use of collocations. This focus on the use of collocations on written texts intends to provide help to researchers, lexicographers, and grammarians on one side, and teachers and students involved in foreign language learning and teaching process on the other. Based on the results obtained, this study may serve as a guideline for teachers to think about the teaching of collocations, and students to make higher and adequate use of collocations.

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