

To what extent can collocational errors be explained by L1 interference?

Approaches to collocations (Allerton et al 2004)

1. Frequency based (Firth 1951):
 - Occurrence of word combinations that is greater than by chance in its context
 - Collocations are word pairs that are found together more frequently than the occurrence of their component words would suggest.
2. Phraseological (Cowie 1998):
 - A collocation is considered as a type of word combination that can be delimited from other types of word combinations.
 - Word combinations: free collocations (combinations), restricted collocations, figurative idioms as well as pure idioms

Types of collocations

- adverb + adjective: *completely satisfied*
- adjective + noun: *a heavy smoker*
- noun + noun: *a surge of anger*
- noun + verb: *prices fall*
- preposition + noun: *for ages*
- verb + noun: *commit suicide*
- verb + expression with preposition: *run out of money*
- verb + adverb: *remember vaguely*

Data

- Eleven written texts, 1980 words in total
- Gymnasium, Year 11, 6th year of learning
- Writing task about *Educating Rita* by William Martin Russel: "Rita tells Frank that she feels 'out of step' [...]. Explain what Rita means."

Occurrences of collocational errors

Table 1: Absolute frequency of collocational errors in the students' texts.

Types of collocational errors	Frequency
All types	44
Verb+ noun	12
Adjective + noun	12
Preposition + noun	9
Verb + expression with preposition	6
Verb+ adverb	3
Noun + noun	2

Comparison with grammatical errors:

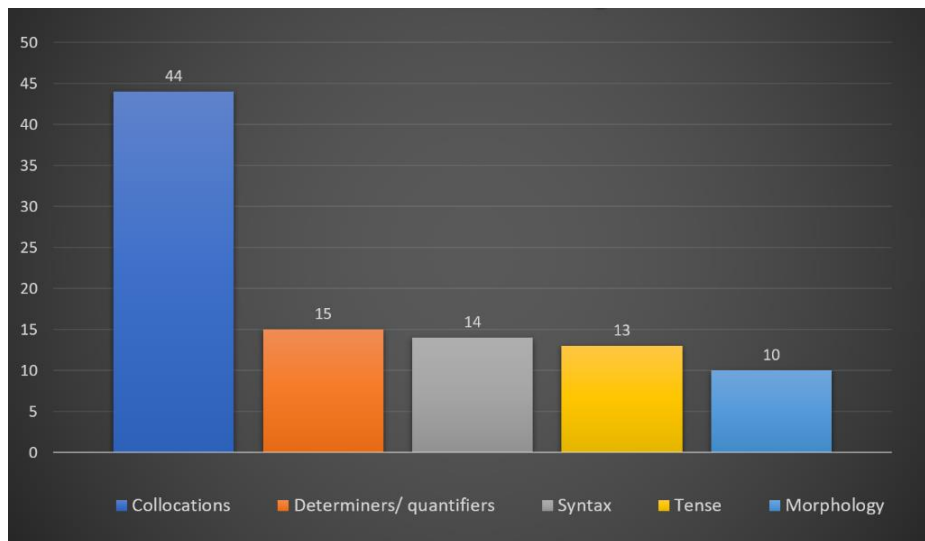


Figure 1: Occurrences of collocational errors compared to errors in other grammatical categories (absolute frequencies).

Learners' use of collocations in more detail

Criteria for further analysis (Nesselhauf 2003)

1. Congruence:
 - congruent = combinations that sound natural in both languages
 - to fulfil a duty – eine Pflicht erfüllen* → congruent
 - to do one's homework – seine Hausaufgaben machen* → non-congruent

2. Restriction
 - Free combination: Substitutability of elements is restricted due to their semantic properties
 - Example: *to read books vs ?to eat books*
 - Restricted combination: Restriction is to some degree arbitrary
 - Example: *to reach a goal vs ?to achieve a goal*

Results

Table 2: Occurrences of correct/wrong verb-noun-collocations with congruence and restriction (absolute frequencies and percentages).

	Congruent	Non-congruent	Free combinations	Restricted combinations
Total	60	13	43	30
Correct usage	53	8	40	21
Wrong usage	7	5	3	9
Wrong usage/total	11.7 %	36.5 %	7.0 %	30.0 %

Table 3: Occurrences of correct/wrong adjective-noun-collocations with congruence and restriction (absolute frequencies and percentages).

	Congruent	Non-congruent	Free combinations	Restricted combinations
Total	36	12	30	28
Correct usage	31	5	16	20
Wrong usage	5	7	4	8
Wrong usage/total	13.8 %	58.3 %	13.3 %	28.6 %

Comparison with findings from Nesselhauf's (2003) study

Investigation of verb + noun collocations in 32 essays written by German-speaking university students of English (500 words per student)

Table 4: Results from Nadja Nesselhauf's study on collocations. Correlation of correct/wrong verb-noun-collocations with congruence and restriction.

	Congruent	Non-congruent	F	RC	I
Total	625	447	846	213	13
C or {C}: n	544	243	625	154	8
Percentage	87.0%	54.4%	73.8%	72.3%	61.5%
{W} or W: n	68	187	196	56	3
Percentage	10.9%	41.8%	23.2%	26.3%	23.1%
Correct/wrong ratio	8:1	1.3:1	3.2:1	2.8:1	2.7:1

Nesselhauf's findings support my own results regarding congruence.

➔ Restriction plays a less significant role than it does in the students' texts.

Conclusion

- Collocations pose one of the biggest challenges for EFL learners
➔ deserve a place in language teaching
- L1 has a considerable impact on the production of collocations
- Learners have to be aware of L1-L2 differences (Contrastive analysis)
- Criteria for collocation selection:
 - frequency of occurrence in a corpus
 - congruence
 - restriction

Usage of corpora and collocation dictionaries useful and should be taught at school

References

Allerton, D.J., Nadja Nesselhauf, Paul Skandera. *Phraseological Units: basic concepts and their application*. Basel Schwabe Verlag, 2004.

Cowie, A.P. (ed.). *Phraseology. Theory, Analysis, and Applications*. Clarendon, 1998.

Firth, J.R. Modes of Meaning. *Essays and Studies* 4. 1951. 118-149. Repr. in: Firth, J.R. *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951*. Oxford University Press, 1957. 190-215.

Nesselhauf, N. *The Use of Collocations by Advanced Learners of English and Some Implications for Teaching*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Ideas for teaching

Vasiljevic, Zorana. *Teaching Collocations in a Second Language: Why, What and How*. Japan: Bunkyo University, December 2014.

<https://www.eflmagazine.com/teaching-collocations-efl-classroom/>

<https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/collocations.htm>