

Collocation Errors in English as Second Language (ESL) Essay Writing

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Abstract : In language learning, Second language learners like their native speaker counter parts, commit errors in their attempt to achieve competence in the target language. The realm of Collocation has to do with meaning relation between lexical items. In all human language, there is a kind of 'natural order' in which words are arranged or relate to one another in sentences so much so that when a word occurs in a given context, the related or naturally co -occurring word will automatically come to the mind. It becomes an error, therefore, if students inappropriately pair or arrange such 'naturally' co - occurring lexical items in a text. It has been observed that most of the second language learners in this research group commit collocational errors. A study of this kind is very significant as it gives insight into the kinds of errors committed by learners. This will help the language teacher to be able to identify the sources and causes of such errors as well as correct them thereby guiding, helping and leading the learners towards achieving some level of competence in the language. The aim of the study is to understand the nature of these errors as stumbling blocks to effective essay writing. The objective of the study is to identify the errors, analyse their structural compositions so as to determine whether there are similarities between students in this regard and to find out whether there are patterns to these kinds of errors which will enable the researcher to understand their sources and causes. As a descriptive research, the researcher samples some nine hundred essays collected from three hundred undergraduate learners of English as a second language in the Federal College of Education, Kano, North- West Nigeria, i.e. three essays per each student. The essays which were given on three different lecture times were of similar thematic preoccupations (i.e. same topics) and length (i.e. same number of words). The essays were written during the lecture hour at three different lecture occasions. The errors were identified in a systematic manner whereby errors so identified were recorded only once even if they occur severally in students' essays. The data was collated using percentages in which the identified number of occurrences were converted accordingly in percentages. The findings from the study indicates that there are similarities as well as regular and repeated errors which provided a pattern. Based on the pattern identified, the conclusion is that students' collocational errors are attributable to poor teaching and learning which resulted in wrong generalisation of rules.

Keywords : collocations, errors, second language learning, ESL students

Conference Title : ICLLL 2015 : International Conference on Language, Linguistics and Literature

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : November 27-28, 2015