

Effects of L1 Transfer on L2 Learners' VN Collocational Use: A Corpus-based Study from Semantic Preference and Semantic Prosody Perspective

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This study investigates whether L1 transfer occurs in L2 verb + noun (VN) collocational production at the semantic preference and semantic prosody levels. Semantic preference and prosody are two important indexes to show a verb's collocational features in terms of collocate selection and the overall attitudinal tendency a verb and its collocates convey in context (Partington 2004; Paciorek and Williams 2015). Cross-linguistic comparisons were conducted to explore the different semantic preference and features between ten high frequency English verbs and their Chinese equivalents, followed by an evaluation of whether these cross-linguistic semantic differences have an effect on L2 learners' VN collocational output. The data used in this study were collected from three corpora: the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the Beijing Language and Culture University Chinese Corpus (BCC), and the Ten-thousand English Compositions of Chinese Learners (TECCL) Corpus. The COCA and the BCC data were used to establish degree of overlap for semantic preference between translation equivalents of verbs in English and Chinese. Semantic prosody values were calculated for verbs in each language respectively. The TECCL was used to gather data on productive VN collocational output for the ten verbs for L1 Chinese learners of English as an L2. These productive collocations were then classified as either native-like or atypical though consultation of COCA data and the Oxford Collocations Dictionary in an effort to determine if the overlap values could be used to explain degree of native-like alignment (or misalignment) in learners' productive use of VN collocations.

The results suggested that the semantic preference overlap between the English verbs and their Chinese equivalents had strong influence on L2 learners' tendency to generate native-like collocations in English. Semantic prosody values, however, were much less reliable in predicting native-like collocations. A backward stepwise regression procedure revealed that the best fitting model was one that included only semantic preference overlap values as a predictor variable without either semantic prosody values $t(8) = 7.17$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .87$. Further analysis showed a strong correlation between semantic overlap scores and native-like percentages $r = .93$, $p < .001$. These findings provide evidence for Jiang's (2000) L2 lexical representation and development model, in which Jiang claims that L1 mediation takes place in L2 lexical production processes at a semantic and syntactic level. The present study indicates that L1 transfer occurs not only at the semantic and syntactic level, but also at the collocational level. In other words, the semantic preference features of a verb stored in one's L1 mental lexicon were also activated and in effect in L2 learners' VN collocational output process.

References

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