Abstract

PhD Dissertation of Hong Dan; theme: "The Influence of Mother Tongue Transfer on English Learners' Use of Collocations and Teaching Strategies"

Major: 531100 – "Linguistics"

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The relevance of the topic of the dissertation. Collocations are considered as the indispensable building blocks of language use. However, second language (L2) learners' development of collocational knowledge lags significantly behind the development of their lexical knowledge, posing a substantial barrier to their overall English proficiency.

First language (L1) transfer is a significant factor hindering second language (L2) learners' acquisition of collocations. L2 learners often rely on L1 thinking, leading to errors by using semantically similar but incorrectly used words. While many studies acknowledge this, opinions differ on the extent of L1's negative impact, partly due to the complexity of collocation acquisition and a lack of rigorous methodology in previous research. Most studies focus on verb + noun and adjective + noun collocations, neglecting other types. Additionally, while L1 can have both negative and positive effects, existing studies emphasize negative transfer and rarely explore the positive impact of L1. Few empirical studies address positive transfer, and comprehensive research on both positive and negative L1 influences across all collocation types is needed to improve teaching strategies.

Connection of the topic of the study with scientific programs. In China, the documents such as *College English Teaching Requirements (2020 Edition), English Syllabus for English Majors in Higher Educational Institutions,* and *National Standards for Teaching Quality of Foreign Language Majors* all point out the importance of

collocation teaching. They emphasize that students need to master a wide range of vocabulary and its correct collocations, and have the ability to use them correctly in different language environments. Besides, in the "14th Five-Year Plan" of the Chinese National Education Science and the key projects of higher education research, it is emphasized that the multidimensional research on the process of foreign language learning, especially the influence of language transfer on second language learning should be strengthened. Therefore, the present study aligns with the ongoing reforms in foreign language teaching within Chinese higher education, reflecting national education policies and guidelines.

Purpose and objectives of the study. The purpose of the dissertation is to explore the influence of L1 on the use of L2 collocations among Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, and to propose corresponding teaching strategies to improve students' L2 collocational competence. It aims to achieve the following specific objectives.

(1) Explore the overall situation of the use of L2 collocations among Chinese EFL learners. For this specific objective, we want to know which types of L2 collocations are most and least frequently used, which types of L2 collocations have the largest number of errors and the highest error rate. Additionally, we aim to identify which types of L2 collocations are most well-mastered by learners and which types require the most attention from teachers and learners.

(2) Explore how L1 transfer influence the use of different types of L2 collocations among Chinese EFL learners. Specifically, for each type of L2 collocations, we aim to find out what percentage is positively influenced by learners' mother tongue and what percentage results from the negative transfer, that is, we want to know whether learners'

mother tongue plays a more positive or negative role. Additionally, we are also curious about how many of the L2 collocational errors are actually due to negative L1 transfer and what the characteristics and deeper causes of these errors are.

(3) Propose specific pedagogical strategies to help Chinese EFL learners to improve their L2 collocational competence. In order to help teachers to improve Chinese EFL learners' collocational competence fundamentally, the pedagogical strategies should be put forward based on the comprehensive and in-depth error analysis and the results of the semi-structured interview conducted in the present study.

Object of the Research. The object of the research is Chinese learners' use of English lexical collocations. This encompasses their collocational errors, patterns of usage, the role of L1 transfer in these errors, and the pedagogical implications of these findings.

Subject of the Research. The subject of the research is Chinese EFL learners. These learners are the participants who will provide data on their use of L2 collocations and their experiences with L1 transfer. They are the focus of the observations, analyses, and the proposed teaching strategies.

Scientific novelty of the study. The present study is the first to comprehensively explore both the positive and negative influence of L1 transfer on all types of L2 lexical collocations. Its scientific novelty lies in the following aspects.

(1) Unlike previous studies that predominantly focus on verb + noun and adjective + noun collocations, this study expands the scope by exploring a broader range of collocational types, including verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, verb + adverb, and adverb + adjective collocations. This broader approach provides a more complete understanding of L2 collocational use among Chinese EFL learners.

(2) Existing research on L2 collocations tends to overemphasize the negative effects of L1 influence, often neglecting the positive contributions of L1. This study addresses this imbalance by systematically investigating both positive and negative influences of learners' L1 on their use of all types of L2 collocations. By adopting a more nuanced approach, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how L1 influences L2 collocational use.

(3) Methodologically, previous research on L1 influence in SLA often relied on subjective judgments to identify language transfer, leading to inconsistent and sometimes contradictory findings. However, the present study employs a more rigorous framework (comparison-induction methodological framework) for judging L1 transfer, as proposed by Cai. Besides, this study uses empirical methods to quantitatively analyze L1 influence in various types of L2 collocations, which provides a more precise analysis within the domain.

(4) Through comprehensive error analysis and semi-structured interviews, the present study identifies specific error patterns and the deeper causes behind them, providing empirical evidence on how L1 influence leads to L2 collocational errors.

(5) The study uniquely proposes targeted teaching strategies grounded in in-depth error analysis and empirical data from semi-structured interviews, offering practical solutions to improve L2 collocational competence in a way that directly addresses identified challenges.

Theoretical significance of the study. Theoretically, the present study helps to deepen the understanding of L1 influence on second language acquisition. L2 collocation learning has always been an important and indispensable part of second language

acquisition; however, previous studies have mostly focused on the negative influence of L1 on the acquisition or use of a particular type of L2 collocations, which provides only a partial view of students' grasp of L2 collocations. The present study analyzes both of the positive and negative L1 influence on L2 learners' use of different types of collocations in a comprehensive and detailed way, presenting a full picture of Chinese EFL learners' acquisition of L2 collocations and providing more empirical support for the theoretical research on language transfer and second language acquisition.

Practical significance of the study. Practically, the present study will ultimately enlighten the teaching and learning of L2 collocations. For teachers, understanding how L1 transfer influence different types of L2 collocations will offer insights into the establishment of various teaching programs and provide them with more opportunities to find effective ways to promote students' L2 collocation learning. For students, the present study can help them realize the importance of collocations in their English expressions and inspire them to use more learning strategies to study L2 collocations. For example, they can pay more attention to the cross-linguistic differences to reduce the chances of making collocational errors and utilize the cross-linguistic similarity to improve their efficiency of L2 collocation learning.

The main provisions of the dissertation submitted for defense.

(1) The dissertation adopted the comparison-induction methodological framework to judge more objectively the L1 transfer of lexical collocations in learners' English writing, which provides the solid foundation for the in-depth analysis of the influence of L1 transfer on L2 collocations.

(2) The dissertation revealed that verb + noun, adjective + noun, and noun + noun

collocations are the most frequently used and also the most error-prone, indicating that they are particularly challenging for Chinese EFL learners.

(3) The dissertation found that L1 transfer plays a more positive than negative role in the use of L2 collocations among Chinese EFL learners, suggesting that Chinese-aided thinking can be a beneficial learning strategy when guided correctly, rather than being entirely discouraged.

(4) The dissertation confirmed that negative L1 transfer was the main cause of collocational errors across all types of collocations. However, the error patterns differ according to the type of collocations, underscoring the complex impact of negative L1 transfer on L2 collocations.

(5) The dissertation proposes targeted pedagogical strategies to improve collocational competence among Chinese EFL learners.

Personal contribution of the applicant. The applicant independently completed this study, including the entire process from research design and literature review to data collection and analysis. The applicant systematically explored the impact of L1 transfer on L2 collocations, offering new theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence. Through in-depth analysis of the data, the complexities of both positive and negative transfer were examined and various types of collocational errors were identified. Based on these findings, targeted pedagogical strategies were proposed, making significant theoretical and practical contributions to the field of second language acquisition.

Approbation of research results. The main results of the study were presented in reports at the following conference: Scientific and Practical Conference "Approbation of Scientific Results of Research of Foreign PhD Doctoral Students of Kyrgyz National

University" in Bishkek in 2023.

Completeness of reflection of the results of the dissertation in publications.

1. An Analysis of Chinese College Student's Lexical Collocation Errors in Their English Writing, Dragoman (Journal of Translation Studies). 2024, Vol. 14, Issue 16. *Scopus*. The first author.

2. GTM in New Era: A Reflection on Its Development and Integration with Other Teaching Methods. Scientific Herald of Uzhhorod University. 2024, Issue 55. *Scopus*. The second author.

3. A Mobile Application for Building Smart Water Consumption Habits, BIO Web of Conferences, 2024, Vol.107, Article Number: 04002. *Scopus.*

4. Кытайстуденттеринин арасында англис жазуусундагы эне тилинин терс миграциясын изилдөөсү. Твердый журнал. Вестник КНУ им.Ж.Баласагына – Бишкек: Спец.выпуск (II), 2023. ISSN: 16948033. The first author.

5. Construction of English Listening Dynamic Teaching Model. Journal of Luoyang Normal University. ISSN: 10094970, CN41-1302/G4. 2024, Vol.43, No.9. The sole author.

Structure of the work. The dissertation consists of an introduction, a body of three chapters (literature review, methodology, results and discussion), a conclusion and a list of references.