The development of collocation use in L2 learners' writing: Effects of pedagogic intervention

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The appropriate use of collocations, prefabricated multi-word combinations, is regarded as a prerequisite for L2 learners. Previous learner corpus studies have shown us that L2 learners tended to use a high proportion of deviant collocations of different types in writing (e.g., Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008). It is of importance to explore the potential of different pedagogical intervention in L2 collocation learning. This study, therefore, employed a quasi-experimental research design and used data from 100 Chinese students of English. While the experimental group (EG) used a data-driven learning (DDL) approach (i.e. direct use of corpora in language learning) (Johns, 1991), a learner dictionary was assigned to one comparison group (CG1) and the other comparison group (CG2) used any tools students preferred. During the intervention, students revised the writing that they produced one week before with different tools. After writing pieces were collected over a period of 15 weeks and compiled into learner corpora, collocations were extracted by using the corpus query language. The results indicated that in general learners in three groups demonstrated a tendency to use more collocations over time. In terms of the percentage of acceptable collocations produced, it has increased gradually for the EG, while the other two groups showed either a weak decline or a stable tendency. Moreover, when we look at the specific types of collocations, the EG, as well as the CG1, showed a significant increase in the use of adjective-noun collocations over time, while the CG2 showed growth in their use of verb-noun collocations. The findings contribute to our understanding of the impact of pedagogical instructions on the development of collocations in L2 learners' writing.