Collocations and the Design of Teaching Materials for Language Learners

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Mackin (1978) already claimed that foreign language students need to be exposed to teaching materials that present a careful selection of collocations geared to the specific difficulties of learners with a particular L1. The researcher argued that specially-tailored teaching materials on collocations would allow teachers to teach phraseological units more effectively and help learners use them more accurately and productively. The author pointed out that the special materials could 'shorten, at least to a certain extent, the long and laborious process of acquiring collocational competence through years of study, reading, and observation of the language'.

Considering the fact that the relevance of teaching collocations has repeatedly been pointed out by well-known researchers (Meunier & Granger, 2008; Nesselhauf, 2005; Conzett, 2000; Hill, 2000; Lenko-Szymanska, 1997; Fontenelle, 1994; Bahns & Eldow 1993; Benson 1989, etc.), and considering that almost thirty four years have passed from Mackin's statement, there has still been a lack of teaching materials whose purpose is to teach collocations to learners with a particular L1 background. The question is: what type of teaching materials should be designed so that students achieve the desired goal? Even though we may notice that a lot has been done in terms of phraseological research, a lot still remains to be done if we really aim to achieve the goal of successfully learning and teaching collocations.

Therefore, the aim of this study, which is part of an ongoing research project carried out at *Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio de Mesquita Filho"* in Brazil, is to discuss results of an investigation on whether the teaching of collocations to Brazilian university students should be implicit or explicit. Furthermore, the research also has the purpose of presenting some collocational aspects of a written learner corpus made up of intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced university students' argumentative essays. With the help of *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 2007), it was possible to retrieve the students' most frequent collocational choices and patterns and the most/least used types of collocations, as well as to trace the influence of the mother tongue on these choices, among other aspects.

This presentation also aims to discuss and suggest some corpus-based activities, exercises and materials which focus on collocations that could be designed to learners of English whose L1 is Portuguese. These activities were developed based on the difficulties that the university learners had regarding the use of collocations, as observed in the essays in the learner corpus. The feasibility of these activities and materials for L2 university students whose L1 is Portuguese will also be examined.

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