Multiword Verb Use among ESL students with Verb–Framed First Language

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Abstract

English has many multiword verbs and collocations. A linguistic division between verb–framed languages and satellite–framed languages is characterized by the presence or absence of particles used in multiword verbs. A verb–framed language (e.g., Arabic, Korean,) encodes semantic information about the path of motion within the main verb, whereas a satellite–framed language (e.g., English, German) encodes directional information in the verb–related particle. The purpose of this study is to use a corpus linguistics tool to examine the relationship among lexical and functional structure in multiword verbs used by ESL learners. The central hypothesis is that there is a robust effect of L1 typological preferences on written expressions in L2.

ملخص البحث:

يوجد في اللغة الأنكليزية العديد من الأفعال المتكونة من اكثر من كلمتين والكلمات المنتظمة.التقسيم اللغوي بين اللغات التي تحوي أفعال مزدوجة الكلام وتلك التي لا تحوي يتم من خلال وجود المضافات اللغوية للفعل فاللغات التي لا تحوي على مضافات كلامية مثل اللغة العربية واللغة الكورية تشفر معلومات دلالية عن حركة الفعل ضمن الفعل الرئيسي بينما تلك اللغات التي تحوي على مضافات للفعل مثل اللغة الأنكليزية واللغة الألمانية تشفر معلومات اتجاهية متضمنة ضمن المضافات للفعل الرئيسي. هدف هذه الدراسة هو استخدام أدوات علم اللغة الحاسوبي لمراقبة العلاقة بين التركيب الوظيفي والدلالي في الأفعال ذات المضافات بين متعلمي اللغة الأنكليزية كلغة ثانية. الفرضية الأساسية للدراسة تكمن حول وجدود تأثر واضح لتشفيرات اللغة الأم بخصوص التعابير الكتابية على اللغة الثانية

Key Words:

Multi-verb word, **Corpus**, **Verb framed**, **Lexical**, **Functional Structure**

Introduction

Multiword verbs include any verb combined with a preposition, particle, adverb, and or any combination. They are used as modals but they are actually semi-modal. Phrasal verbs take on a particle, usually mistaken for a preposition ⟨Turn on the radio⟩. Prepositional verbs have a preposition that heads a full prepositional phrase ⟨Look after the kids⟩. With both verb structures combined, there is a particle-prepositional verb ⟨Put up with the radio and the kids⟩.

For convenience, all of these will be referred to as multiword verbs.

These grammatical structures are different from single Latinate verbs. English has Germanic roots but also Latin and a good deal of French. Therefore, English has both verb–framed and satellite–framed verbs. The translation issues are more difficult with multiword verbs since they do not make sense based on the individual definitions of the words involved. This makes Multiword verbs non–compositional.

Distinctions should be made to properly define multiword verbs and collocations to separate them from other types of colligation, words that can merely coexist grammatically. At the center of the matter is substitution. A collocation is the formulaic combination of words that native speakers expect to hear or see while a colligation is simply a random combination of words. According to Nesselhauf (2003), the sense of the verb in collocations is so specific that it only allows a combination with a small set of nouns, adjectives or particles. Verbs, on the other hand, cannot be used in the same sense with all words that are syntactically or semantically possible. In other words, you can make up with a friend but you can't make up with a cup of coffee.

Faced with several issues regarding authentic speech production and fluency, advanced ESL students must correctly select from a perceived collection of idioms, slang or collocations. No doubt idiom and slang is a large part of spontaneous production by native speakers, and their definitions are quite popular with ESL students, but these weigh heavily on contextual, cultural and ethno–social factors. Collocations and multiword verbs, on the other hand, are transparent and are used in nearly every aspect of writing, speaking and reading irrespective of setting or register.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and replicate the functional use of multiword verbs by college ESL students who come from a Verb Framed Language (VFL), to determine where some of the interference may lie in translating from L1. Evidence will be shown on how languages within the VFL family (Korean, Arabic, Chinese) have a single word, main verb that shows motion and the verb's path of action (I submit homework), whereas Satellite Framed Languages (English, German) use a verb to show motion and a particle to show the path of action (I turn in homework). Multiword verbs inherently used in English could be functionally misunderstood by some ESL students and should consequently be an area of

concentration in grammar instruction with particular attention to identify their separable nature.

Review of the Literature

Feist (2010) examines why and how a verb's path could be extended to other uses by the native speakers of verb framed and satellite framed languages. With a single verb, the NS of a VFL will impart and extend the path and motion of one event onto another using the same single verb irrespective of the manner of action while someone who speaks a SFL will do the same without regard to path of motion. A few have argued that Chinese possesses equipollent verbs meaning that the verb of action and the particle showing path or manner are co–equal. Talmy (2008) rejects the notion of a third classification of Chinese from satellite–framed to equipollently–framed.

Chen & Guo (2009) go further and believe that motion events in Chinese narratives do not represent satellite–framed characteristics nor those of verb–framed but an equipollently–framed manner. They put forth that both verbs, in a string, and the particle showing manner and path of motion are equal whereas in English the particle is subordinate to the main verb. They concentrate on spoken language instead of written

language but the study of language typology could result in a third language classification.

Interlingual problems play an important role in regards to historical significance and culture. Marian and Kaushanskaya (2006) and Hébert (1987) investigated how two languages will interact and influence bilinguals where moving from one language to another isn't even noticed. This is known as code switching and begs the question about how to collocate across languages. Obviously, such problems constitute the translator's main concern of searching for a suitable means by which to communicate an idea. The German word "Weltanschauung" has received universal agreement to represent the philosophical term "World View" while the German phrase "Ei des Columbus" (Egg of Columbus) is equitable to English, specifically American English, as "Eureka" (Famed expression, in Greek, of Archimedes, εὕρηκα). Neither of these latter phrases have anything to do with one another either historically or culturally but both are considered to be exclamations of discovery but Christopher Columbus isn't German nor is the state motto of California, Eureka! and the subsequent gold rush particularly Greek.

Typically, "ascend," means to climb but this path of action is different in Chinese. Deng & Chen (2012) talk about how in English the particle "up" is included with climb to indicate "climbing up a mountain" or to "climb up in a chair". What the Chinese learners must do is translate the path and manner of action from Mandarin into English. Cantonese is nearly identical to Mandarin in regards to multiword verbs and functional grammar so this is transferable to most Chinese speakers. If the translation is not made then the literal translation from Chinese would denote someone ascending a throne, such as a Queen or a Pope, instead of a baby climbing up into a high chair.

Making learners aware of the collocation phenomenon is considered the foremost and sometimes the only task for teachers. Placing it on a syllabus as a means to consciousness–raising is not nearly enough (Nesselhauf, 2003). According to Williams (2012) a large and rich vocabulary is essential if children are to understand the variety of books they will read in school, especially given the vocabulary demands of content–area texts. There remains some debate, however, over how to actually teach these unique combinations. More traditional pedagogical approaches seem to be merely pointing out that they exist. If the theoretical

approaches and methodological paradigms discussed in this paper are adopted and coupled with prepositional phrases and verb satellite interpretations, then the predictive nature of these unique noun/verb/preposition/particle combinations could be scaffolded and unlocked. This could ease the hesitancy of the student and create better L2 fluency.

While there appear to be corpus mistakes, Su (2010) brings up very interesting points. How does the impact of our first language reflect in our second language choices when grasping for words during a communication act? Should these be considered improper, inappropriate or frowned upon by the NS or should they be embraced as an opportunity to teach and to learn? Irrespective of the research mistakes made by Su, these questions could be further studied using appropriate corpora that are more representative of the target language with a clear delineation between British and American English.

As a learner of languages and since I speak Arabic, I understand the mistakes one could make in producing L2 collocated phrases. Nesselhauf (2003) found that 56% of the mistakes made in producing a verb–noun agreement were from L1 influences (p. 235). This is very common among Arab learners of English.

For example "يعمل الواجب البيتي" which means "to do homework." "يعمل" is a very general satellite verb in Arabic and is used in everything from making coffee, cooking, or doing chores. Arabic also is a very satellite verb language where there is always one single verb to describe action whether it is dynamic or stative and in order for Arab speakers to express actions, then they need to attach an adjective or adverb to describe the verb. This puts the Arabic L2 learners at a disadvantage. Concentrating on correct verb usage is certainly the optimum way in helping L1 Arab speakers to make proper collocated pairs in English.

When addressing the needs of students in mid to advanced ESL learning it is vitally important to take into account their cultural background, motivational investment, local customs, L1 influences, L2 deficiencies, cognates, false cognates and level of competence. Becket and Gonzalez (2004) point out, "Even though motivational factors are considered important in L2 learning in adults, there are contradictory research findings about the positive or negative influence of integrative and instrumental motivation (p.162)." The instructor then must be educated and made aware of the proper approaches to these problems. Grammar translation and behaviorism

is outdated as is rote memory and conjugation drills. A student centered, advocacy focused attitude using a content based approach to field specific instruction could be far more efficacious and modern.

Realizing which pedagogical model should be followed bears on classroom management, what is being learned and the retention rate of learning inside the ESL environment. The only reason for having a class, for teaching English, is the student; therefore a student centered attitude should be adopted. If assignments and instructions are tailored to the students and relevant to their needs then the students may invest more into the class.

Analysis and Results:

The data used in this replication paper is taken from ESL students' writings. The students were taking an advanced undergraduate ESL writing course. Antconc software was used to process five writing samples that students wrote in the beginning of the semester and as their first writing assignment and five other writing samples that the students wrote in the end of the semester and as their final writing assignment in the course. The early writing samples were a summary and response essays while the later ones were a mini research papers. The Antcons is a very efficient corpus

linguistics software and is very users friendly. Antconc was used to see how multiword verb were used by the ESL learners in their academic writing, interlingual influence and to track changes in the use of the multi words verb used over the period of the semester.

Generally, in the early data set, it has been noticed that students rarely used multi word verbs in their writing, something that can be attributed to their L1 intervention translation. The use of the verb "Live" which has a stative sense in English was seen to have used in a dynamic sense since it is dynamic in Arabic. English verbs such as "get" which are often used with particles to mean different things, have been used by ESL students with the stem "get" only.
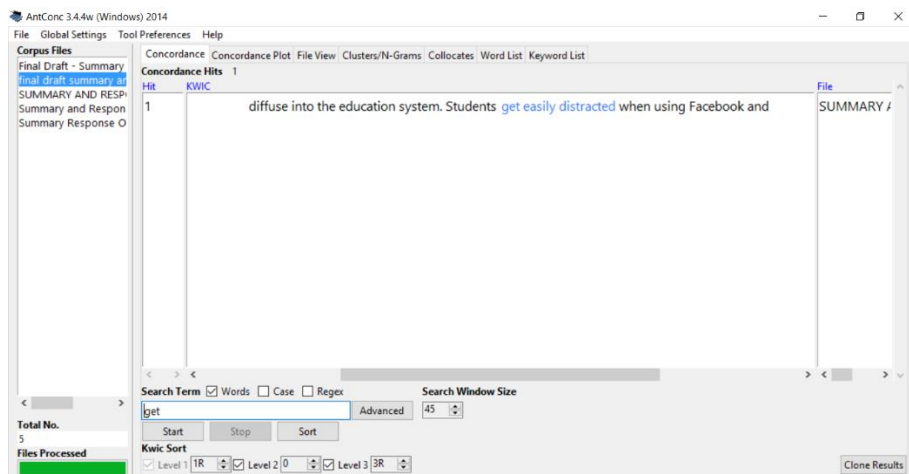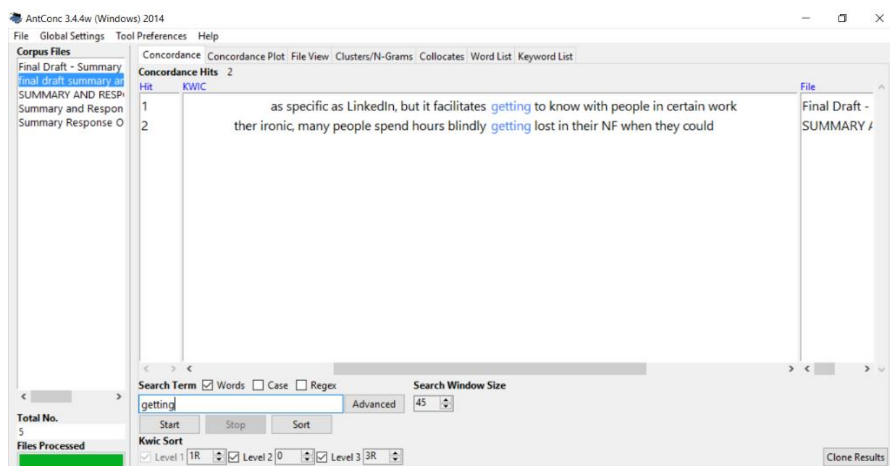
L1 intervention was also seen when students used stative verb in a progressive sense which is possible in satellite verb languages such Arabic and Spanish but is not often used in English. An example is the verb "live" which was used with (–ing) form.
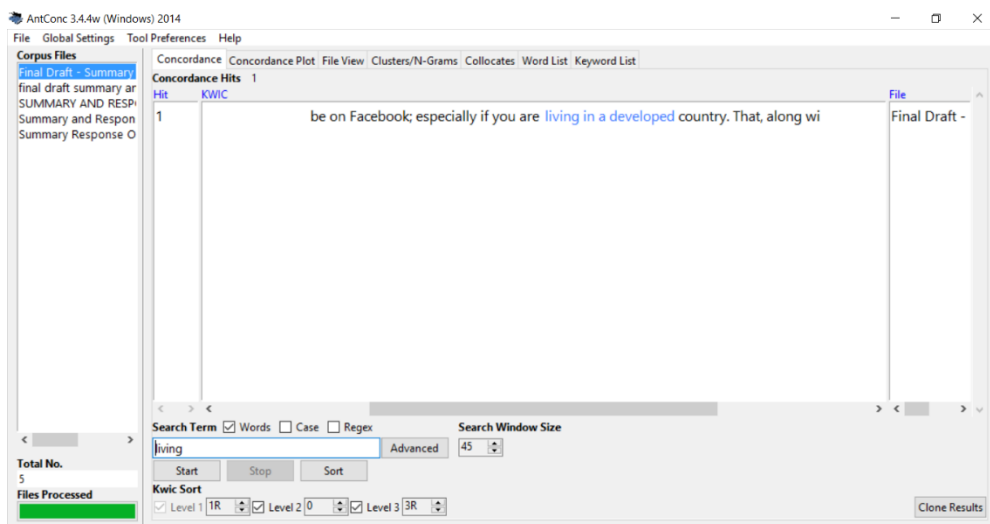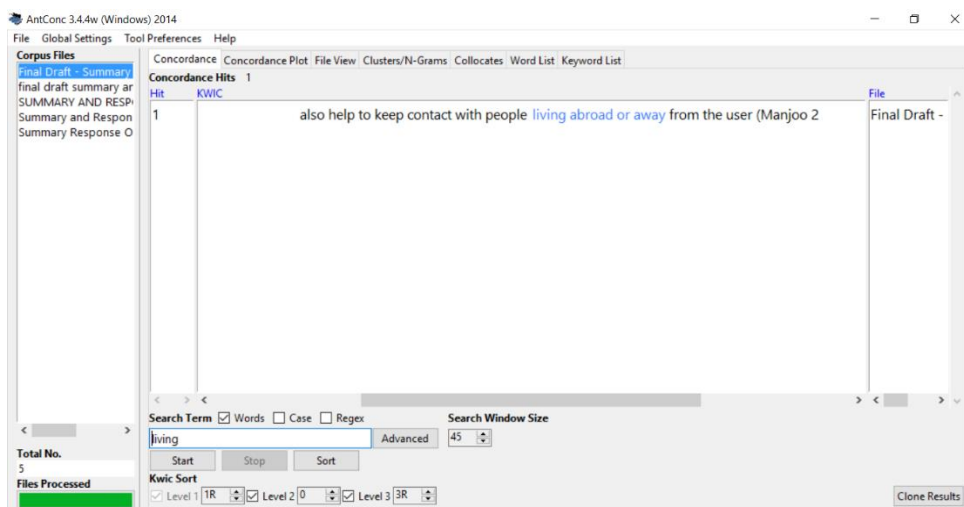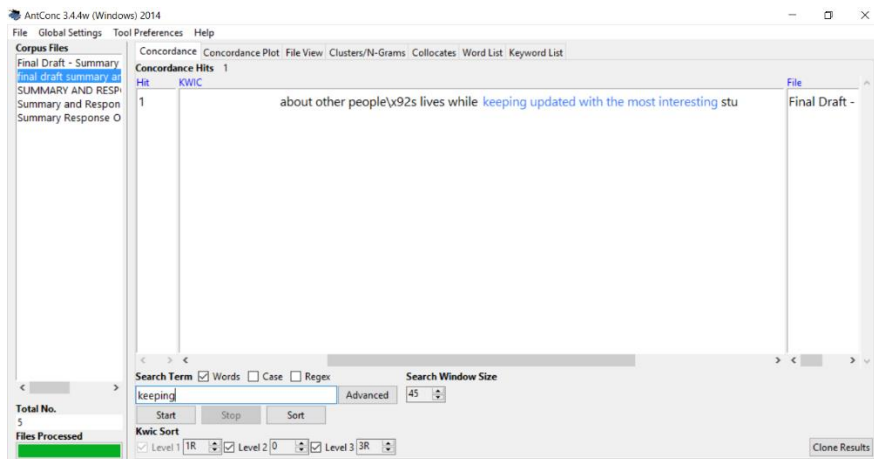
Similarly some verbs that ESL students used with preposition appeared to be translated from their first language. The phrase "keep under control" for instance could have been substituted by the verb "control". This is also an apparent translation from first language.
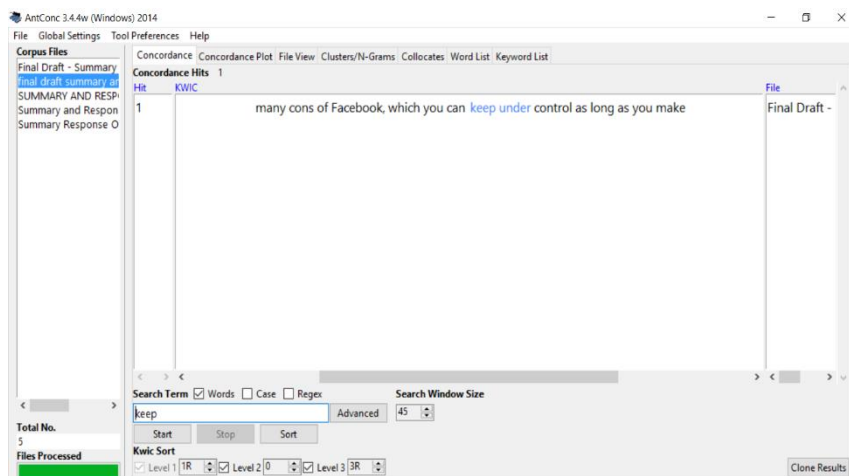
And in the following one, **the student problem wanted to mean** "**keep up to date**":

The few instances where we saw multiword verbs, **the use of the verb was not correct**. **One of the students used the verb** "**take place**" **to refer to moments which is strange**. "**Happen**" **would have been the right verb to use here**.
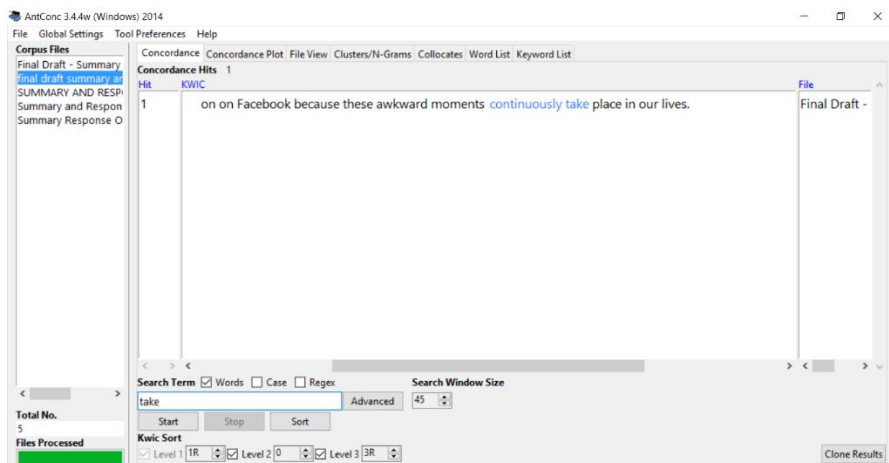
It has been noticed that one of the ESL students included considerable number of multiword verbs in her articles. Examples are:

Staying away from

Result in

Log in

Find out

However, it appeared that student is very competent in English and could be considered a native English speakers since English was the language of instruction in her education since elementary schools.

Checking the use of the multi word verbs in the later writing assignments (the mini research papers), there seems to be more use of the multiword verbs:
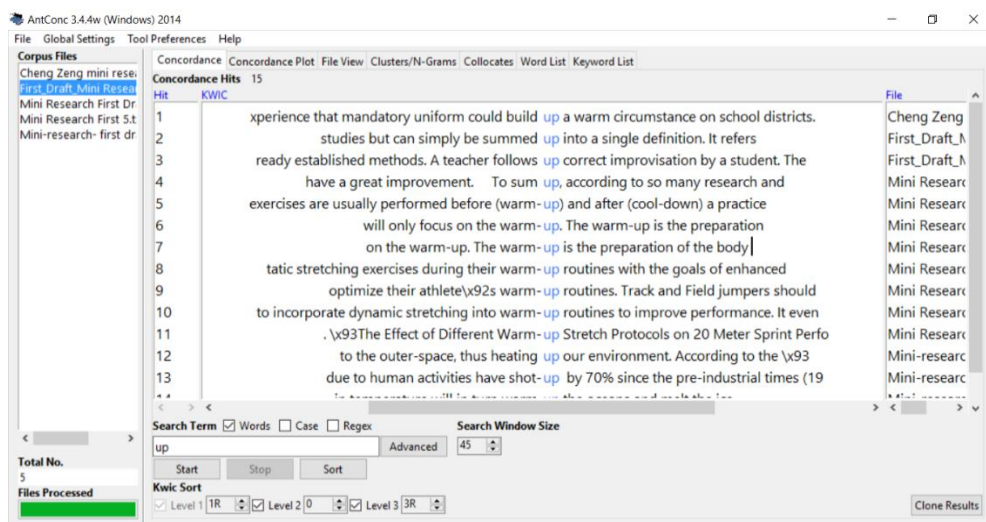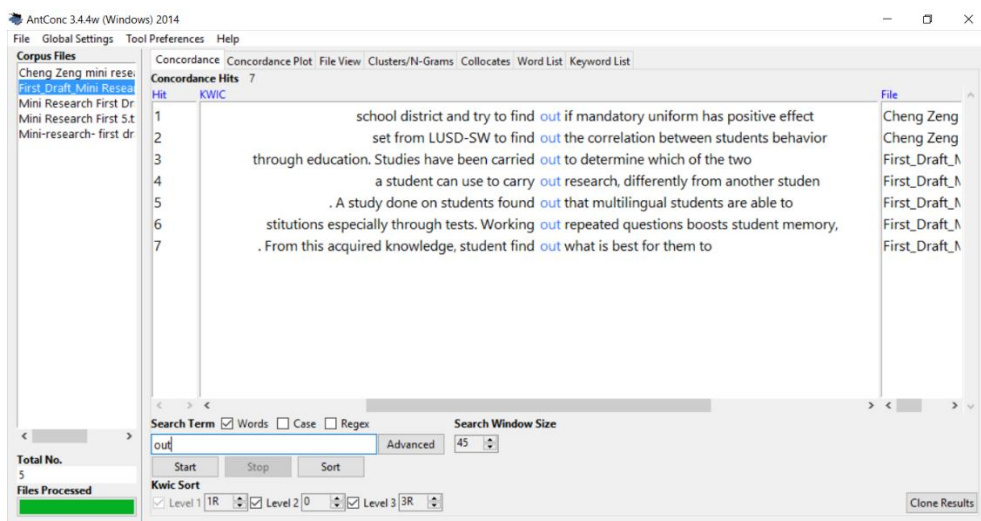
However, this difference might be attributed to the fact that this writing genre (research) which is often associated with the some writing jargons that are mostly multi word verbs and are very frequent in writing a research paper. Since students were asked to read several articles on the topic before they could start writing their mini research project, the exposure they had to these jargon multi word verbs and the need to read, preview and annotate would have provided students with a good linguistics input and context to understand and the meaning and use of those multiword verbs:

Discussion and Conclusion:

As seen, ESL students, including advanced learners, tend to avoid the use of multiword verbs due to fact that their meaning is difficult to predicate and because students have different sense of the verbs in their first language. Some of the multi word verbs used were those that are very common and frequently used. Others were those that are very specific to the genre of writing as seen in the case of the end of the semester data sets which comprised mini research projects with frequent multi word verb specific to research writing such as "find out" and focus on".

Thus, it seems that a focus on the teaching of multi word verbs to ESL students is a must especially for those who come from satellite frames verbs and where L1 influence could hinder their use and

understanding of multi words verbs in the English language. Even with metacognitive strategies, verb–noun agreements and formulaic approaches many are left without a clear pedagogy on how to teach the grammar of multiword verbs and collocations. Rote memory and daily word diaries may be the only pedagogical practices that work effectively. While some research has narrowly focused attention away from grammar instruction to a content based approach where collocations are learned along with the context and the field of study (Mohan, 1985), I do not advocate a class only on the subject of grammar but would prefer to teach grammar along more pressing issues such as vocabulary or even pronunciation. If grammar were taken as systemic and functional as Halliday (1994) suggests then the rule based tedium could be replaced with a more content and task based approach.

The selection of multiword verbs by the ESL students shows how their L1 has an impact on language decisions. Su (2010) focuses on the CLE and concentrates on metaphorical discrepancies between word usage in Chinese and how it compares to English. This illustrates how the two languages are culturally different. The study's most important finding is that there is a thinking pattern difference between the

Chinese metaphorical description of words and an English portrayal of the same word. Chinese, while in the same category as English as a satellite framed language has fundamental differences between manner and path of motion.

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