

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**A DATA-DRIVEN CONTRASTIVE
STUDY ON MALAY ESL
LEARNERS' USE OF LEXICAL
VERBS AND VERB-NOUN
COLLOCATIONS IN
ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING**

SHAZILA ABDULLAH

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy


Academy of Language Studies

June 2015

AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduates, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regularating the conduct of my study and research.

Name of Student	:	Shazila Abdullah
Student I.D. No.	:	2009525519
Programme	:	Doctor of Philosophy (Applied Linguistics)
Faculty	:	Academy of Language Studies
Thesis Title	:	A Data-Driven Contrastive Study on Malay ESL Learners’ Use of Lexical Verbs and Verb- Noun Collocations in Argumentative Writing
Signature of Student	:	
Date	:	June 2015

ABSTRACT

Learner writing is often characterized by linguistic errors, especially in lexical verbs, which can contribute to communicative incompetence. It is also generally known that verb-noun collocations are a characteristic of native writing. The main objective of this thesis is to investigate the linguistic errors made by non-native learners and to suggest ways how they can improve their level of proficiency. Previous studies have looked into the occurrences of either lexical verbs or verb-noun collocations with little emphasis on the phraseology of verb-noun collocations formed from commonly used lexical verbs. Based on these premises, the thesis explores the use of lexical verbs and verb-noun collocations in two learner corpora, one of which is a native learner corpus and the other a specific group of non-native learners, i.e. Malay ESL learners. The data-driven analysis specifically adopted for this study allows for a focus on the most commonly used lexical verbs and verb-noun collocations. Furthermore, an in-depth contrastive interlingual analysis between the corpora of native and non-native learners enables the researcher to uncover the difficulties that learners face in using these lexical items. The meticulous processes involved in compiling the non-native learner corpus and the extraction of verb-noun collocations add to the uniqueness of the thesis. The thesis addresses three main questions through a linguistic analysis using both quantitative and qualitative methods with the assistance of WordSmith Tools. First, it seeks to examine linguistic elements of the lexical verbs; second, to ascertain the phraseological patterns of verb-noun collocations; and third, to identify the non-native elements found in the use of lexical verbs and verb-noun collocations. The results reveal some similarities and differences that help in understanding how lexical verbs and verb-noun collocations are actually used by both native and non-native learners in writing. What is most obvious is the Malay ESL learners' lack of vocabulary repertoire, which indicates a lack of vocabulary acquisition. The analysis of verb-noun collocations reveals an array of phraseological deviations that stem from a lack of knowledge in syntagmatic relationships between the two lexical elements in the collocations. It is, thus, essential for learners to learn how to use a variety of lexical verbs, including the lexical patterns and grammatical patterns of verb-noun collocations in order to use them appropriately, especially when these patterns differ from their L1. A framework on learning and teaching of the lexical verbs and verb-noun collocations has been proposed based on the findings. This framework can contribute to the improvement of an English syllabus, material design and teaching methodology. It is hoped that the most important contribution of this thesis is to increase awareness of the importance of phraseology in ELT so that various measures can be taken to enhance learners' communicative competence, which should be the aim of every English course.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praises be to Allah swt, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, for leading me to this wonderful journey of a once in a life time experience.

First and foremost, my utmost appreciation goes to my supervisor cum mentor, Professor Dr. Noorzan Mohd Noor, whose consistent guidance, drive and kind words of encouragement, tremendously helped me in realizing my dream. I am ever so thankful to have her as my supervisor: she has always believed in my ability since the day she became my supervisor. I also wish to thank my co-supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Azni Abdullah, whose views and comments as a native speaker had assisted me in shaping up my writing. I am also indebted to the Dean of the Academy of Language Studies, Associate Professor Dr. Normah Abdullah, for the permission given to use the faculty's exam scripts as my data. The data provided became the backbone of my study.

I wish to extend my gratitude to the Center for English Corpus Linguistics (CECL) in University of Louvain, Belgium, for giving me consent to use LOCNESS as a part of my data, and to Dr. Mike Scott of University of Liverpool, the creator of the powerful WordSmith Tools, for his kind assistance in guiding me to use the statistical part of WordSmith. There are also a few prominent scholars, among whom are, Professor Dr. Sylviane Granger and Dr. Shin Ishikawa, whose constructive feedback on a certain part of my study, are very much appreciated.

I owe my thanks to the former Director of UiTM Perak, for granting me the leave to pursue my doctorate, and the Ministry of Higher Education, for awarding the scholarship that enabled me to finance my study.

I am also very grateful for the continuous support I received from my wonderful friends: A big thank you to my closest PhD buddies, Suzana, Shahnaz, Puteri and Hazlina, for all the sharing during the wonder years of discovering; my corpus allies, Roslina and Rafidah, for their assistance in guiding me through a field unbeknownst to me previously; my wonderful friends in UiTM, Noya, Linda, Shareena, Ameri, Aziah, Nora and Syikin who have always been by my side; my ever-willing assistant, Suraina, who effortlessly reorganized my Mendeley references and completed the final formatting; my IpSis mates, Kak Lin, Kak Mona, Azah, Salina, Azam, Nik, Hasmi, Emi, Ain, Husaini, Fizah, Leha (the list goes on) for the invaluable knowledge-sharing and for making the Ipsis work-station a bearable place to be ; and to Tisha, Surina, Lyn, Azizah, Pani, Fidah, Airil, Huzei, Fazi and Yati, for making my conference trips to Seoul, Auckland and Kobe memorable ones.

Last but not least, I thank my family, who have been my source of inspiration, for all the tangible and intangible support that I continuously received from each and every one of them throughout my years of study.

For all the kindness received, I am forever in debt.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xvii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.1.1 Collocations	3
1.1.1.1 Collocational Competence in Writing	5
1.1.1.2 Collocations in Second Language Learning	5
1.1.1.3 Lexical Collocations: Verb-Noun Collocations	8
1.1.2 Lexical Verbs	9
1.1.2.1 Lexical Verbs in Academic Writing	10
1.1.2.2 The Learning and Teaching of Lexical Verbs	10
1.1.3 Corpus Linguistics	12
1.1.3.1 Corpus Linguistics and Contrastive Analysis	13
1.1.3.2 Corpus-Based vs. Corpus-Driven: A Data-Driven Study	14
1.1.4 The English Language Situation In Malaysia	15
1.2 Statement of the Problem	16
1.3 Purpose of the Study	17
1.4 Objectives of the Study	18
1.5 Research Questions	18
1.6 Significance of the Study	20
1.7 Scope, Limitations and Delimitations of the Study	23
1.8 Organization of Thesis	24
1.9 Definition of Terms	25
1.9.1 Data-Driven Approach	25
1.9.2 Corpus-Based Contrastive Analysis	26