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AN INVESTIGATION INTO COLLOCATIONAL ERRORS IN WRITING OF SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES , UNIVERSITY OF DANANG

Field : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
Code : 60.22.02.01

M.A. THESIS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
(A SUMMARY)

Danang, 2015

The study has been completed at The University of Foreign Language Studies, The University of Danang

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The thesis was orally defended at the Examining Committee

Field   : The English Language

Time   : July 18, 2015

Venue : The University of Danang

The origin of the thesis is accessible for the purpose of reference at:

- The University of Foreign Language Studies, The University of Danang

- The Information Resources Center, The University of Danang

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

In order to have a good command of English, students need to gain not only knowledge of grammatical and semantic rules but also knowledge of how native speakers use the language naturally by taking advantage of prefabricated forms such as collocations. Collocations are considered integral to vocabulary knowledge, which is essential for EFL learners to develop their ability of speaking and writing. The importance of collocational knowledge in second language (L2) competence has been widely acknowledged because collocations form a major part of native speakers' competence.

However, learning and using proper collocations are a big challenge to EFL learners. As far as difficulties in collocational use are concerned, Vietnamese learners of English are by no means an exception. Despite having sufficient lexical or grammatical knowledge, most Vietnamese EFL learners seem to experience serious problems with the production of collocational patterns. Such erroneous as *big rain, drink medicine, listen music, do a cake,* just to name a few, are not due to poor mastery of grammar or lexis. It, therefore, seems essential to identify the problems that EFL learners have in dealing with collocations including their knowledge and use of collocation. For that reason, I have conducted the study on **"An investigation into collocational errors in writing of second-year students at University of Foreign Language Studies, University**

of Danang" to provide a further insight into this issue in the context of Vietnamese universities.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims

This study aims at investigating collocational error types and the frequency of collocational errors in writing that sophomore students majoring in English at University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Danang make. In addition, the sources of EFL undergraduate students' collocational errors will also be discussed in the study. Finally, some important practical implications for English collocation teaching and learning will be suggested. It is hoped that this research will help students raise awareness of collocations so that they can minimize their collocational errors and improve their style in writing.

1.2.2. Objectives

The study is intended to:

- find out collocational error types and the frequency of collocational errors in writing made by second- year students at University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Danang

- discuss some main sources of collocational errors

- suggest implications of the study for teaching and learning collocations in EFL context

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the aims and objectives mentioned above, this study tries to answer the following questions:

1.	What collocational error types are made by second-year students majoring in English at University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Danang in their writing?

2.	What are main sources of collocational errors?

3.	What are implications of the study for teaching and learning collocations in EFL context?

1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the collocational errors made by undergraduate students in their writing, but focusing on lexical and grammatical collocational errors. In this study, the second-year students majoring in English at University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Danang (UUFLS, UD) would be chosen as the representative informants.

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is widely accepted that incorrect collocations are a serious problem for EFL learners. Therefore, exploring the types of collocational errors that EFL students produce and finding out the major sources of these errors will help students reduce the rate of their collocational errors.

At the local level, this study is possibly beneficial for the Department of English in University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Danang to take practical steps to prioritize teaching collocations and to enhance teachers' skills in teaching lexis.

The present study can also help EFL students, especially those at the University of Foreign Language Studies, to be aware of the types of collocational errors and practice more collocations so that they avoid collocational errors. Moreover, the results of this

study can provide information for English curriculum and course planners to design appropriate lexical materials and activities concerning EFL learners' problems with collocations.

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The research includes five chapters: Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 (Literature Review and Theoretical Background), Chapter 3 (Research Design and Methodology), Chapter 4 (Findings and Discussion), and Chapter 5 (Conclusions and Implications)

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.1.1. Types of collocational errors

Nesselhauf [49] examined 32 essays written by German speaking learners of English to explore the use of verb + noun collocations in their free written production. Mahmoud [42] investigated 42 essays written by Arabic-speaking university students majoring in English to explore their collocation error types and the causes of these errors. Several researchers, including Chen [16], Huang [30], Li [36], and Liu [39] investigated Taiwanese EFL learners' difficulty in producing collocations.

In Vietnam, Tran & Nguyen [65] investigated "*Students' ability in using English collocations*" and showed that the most typical collocation mistakes were *Noun + Noun* and *Adverb +*

Adjective. The research "*Some common collocation mistakes among second-year students*" carried out by Duong & Lai [20] indicated that three highest proportions of collocation mistakes included *Adjective+ Noun, Preposition + Noun* and *Verb + Preposition*.

2.1.2. Sources of collocational errors

First of all, Al-Zahrani [1], , Bahns [3] , Bahns and Eldaw [4], and Farghal & Obiedat [22] proclaimed that many EFL learners' collocational errors were caused by their L1 interference. Secondly, Howarth [27] reported that EFL learners have insufficient knowledge of collocations . Another important factor, which is culture, also contributes to collocation mistakes among learners of English. Last but not least, learning strategies also have effects on the collocation use because each student has his own way of learning which may be effective such as contextual learning, dictionary and note- taking (Nguyen [51]).

Although there is a considerable amount of literature on investigating collocational errors, there is still a need to conduct further research to obtain information about types of collocational errors as well as the causes of these errors. That is the reason why this research comes into being investigated with the intention of contributing more literature about using collocations in writing of second-year English-majored students in the context of UFLS, UD.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. The notion of collocations

The term "collocation" was first discussed with regard to language learning by Palmer [54], and later introduced by Firth [23] to the field of theoretical linguistics (cited in Hsu [29]). Collocation

has commonly been approached from two different ways. One is the "frequency-based", or Firthian, approach in which a collocation is considered as the co-occurrence of words within a certain distance of each other in spoken or written frequently appear in a language. The second approach to collocation is known as the "phraseological" approach, which is considered as the combination of two words where one of the elements is freely chosen on the basis of meaning and the other is lexically restricted to some words.

2.2.2. Classifications of collocations

A number of researchers have attempted to classify collocations into different categories (Benson, et al. [6], Hill [26], Lewis [35]). There are three different ways to categorize collocations. Specifically, they are classified by (1) their strength, (2) their structure, and (3) frequency of words.

2.2.3. Properties of collocations

2.2.4. The Importance of Collocation in EFL/ESL Education

CHAPTER 3
METHOD AND PROCEDURES

3.1. OVERVIEW
3.2. RESEARCH DESIGNS

This study is a quantitative research to classify the collocational errors the participants made into two categories: grammatical and lexical collocational errors.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODS

The main methods employed in the study include statistical method, descriptive method, and analytical method.

3.4. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

To address the research questions, the following steps were conducted during my preparation. At the beginning, I collected copies of sophomore students' writing samples. All of these copies were coded randomly to make them anonymous. Next, I read the participants' compositions and try to find out the meaning that the participants wished to express. After reading their compositions two times, I embarked on identifying, categorizing and analyzing the participants' collocational errors in their writing samples. Finally, the sources of collocational errors will be discussed.

3.5. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLES

The participants in the present study are 100 sophomore students majoring in English at University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Danang. The data for this study came from a corpus of 200 written productions of participants who took the Language Skills courses in their second-year syllabus at the UFLS, UD. The data included two kinds of writing samples, an assignment and an in-class activity.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the participants' writing samples were entered into computer files for analysis by using Excel. The data were typed into database for the purpose of data analysis: the types of collocational errors, the topics of the writing samples, the

participants' numbers, and the sentences consisting of the collocational errors.

3.8. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Since the samples of collocational errors are collected from writing of second- year students of the UFLS, UD, the source of data is totally authentic, and quite reliable. The results of study, on the one hand, provide some theoretical background for studying collocations, one phenomenon in phraseology, on the other hand, make a contribution to collocation learning and teaching. Thus, the research result is significant not only in theory and but also in actual practice.

3.9. SUMMARY

CHAPTER 4
# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. RESULTS

4.1.1. Collocational error types

The corpus analysis revealed that of all 1525 collocations, 376 cases of collocational errors were found. Two hundred and twenty-three errors were grammatical errors and one hundred and fifty-three errors were lexical errors (table 4.1). Thus, the results revealed that the participants made more grammatical collocational errors (223:59.3%) than lexical collocational errors (153:40.7%) in the 200 writing samples.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Grammatical and Lexical
Collocational Errors

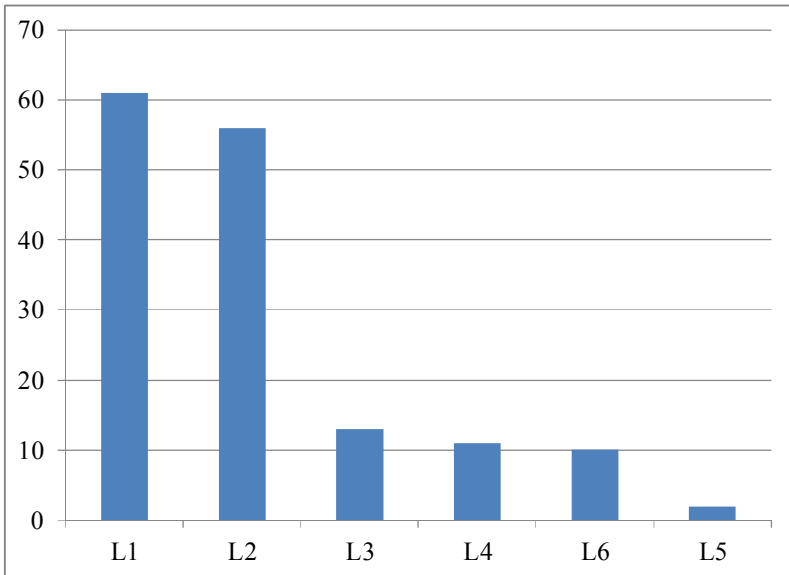|	Number of Collocational Errors	Percentage
Grammatical Collocational Errors	223	59.3 %
Lexical Collocational Errors	153	40.7%

In the present study, the participants made seventeen collocational error types including: G1 (N+Prep), G2 (N + to Inf), G4 (Prep+ N), G5 (Adj+ Prep), G8 (ABCO) (V + direct O + to + indirect O = V + indirect O + direct O/ V + direct O + to + indirect O / V + direct O + for + indirect O = V + indirect O + direct O / V + O1 + O2), G8 (D) (V+ Prep +O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O), G8 (EH) (V+ to Inf./ V+ O+ to Inf.), G8 (FI) (V + bare Inf./ V+ O +bare Inf.), G8 (GJK) (V+ V-ing/ V+ O +V-ing / V+ a possessive and V-ing), G8 (LQ) (V + that clause/ V + (O) + wh-clause/ wh-phrase), G8 (MNS) (V+ O + to be+ C/ V+ O+ C/ V+C), L1(V+N), L2 (Adj+ N), L3 (N + V), L4 (N of N), L5 (Adv + Adj) and L6 (V+Adv).
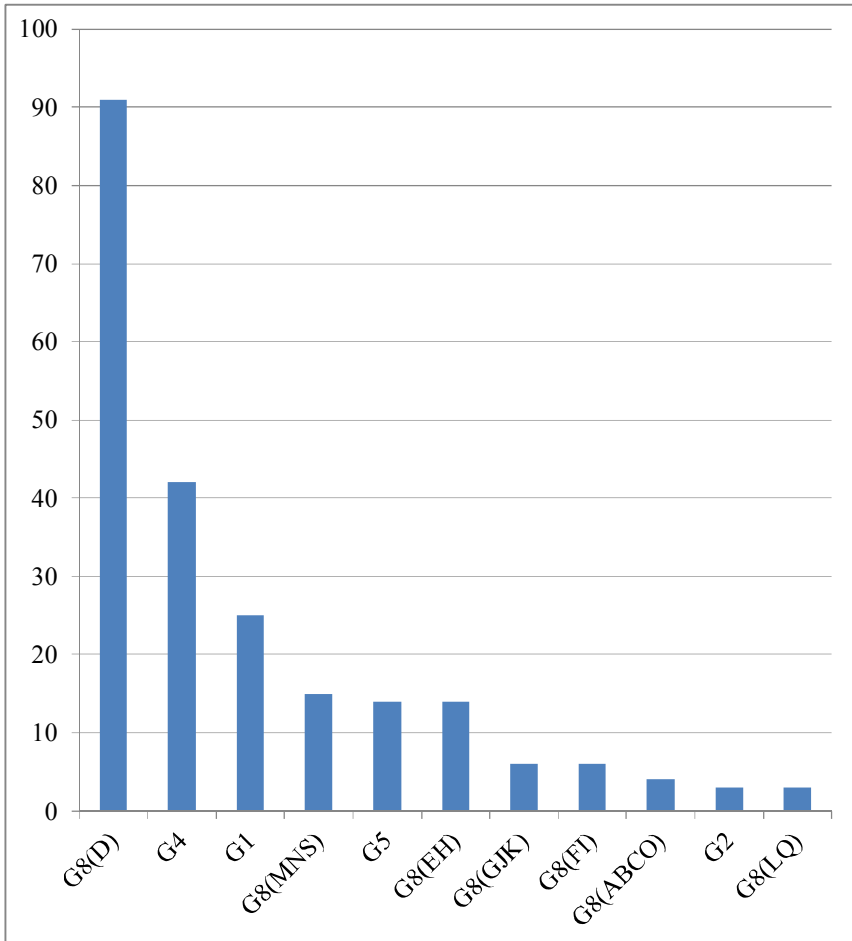
Figure 4.1 Number of Grammatical Collocational Errors

in the Writing Samples

Among these grammatical errors, the G8 (D) (V+ Prep+ O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O) errors occurred most frequently in the writing samples (N= 91), and G8 (LQ) (V + that clause/ V + (O) + wh-clause/ wh-phrase) errors were the least frequent.

Figure 4.2 showed that of all the six lexical collocational errors, the errors of L1 (V+ N) (N = 61) appeared most frequently and L5 (Adv + Adj) errors (N= 2) were the least frequent in the participants' writing.

Figure 4.2 Number of Lexical Collocational Errors
in the Writing Samples

4.1.2. The Frequency of Collocational Errors

Table 4.2 shows the frequency and percentage of collocational errors in 200 writing samples. It was found that G8 (D) (V+ Prep +O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O) and L1 (V+N) errors occurred most frequently in the participants' writing and the percentage of G8 (D) (V+ Prep +O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O) and L1 (V+N) errors accounted for

24% and 16% respectively. On the other hand, L5 (Adv+ Adj) errors were the least errors and the percentage of L5 errors made up1%.

Table 4.2 The Frequency and Percentage of Different Types of Collocational Errors in the EFL Participants' Writing Samples

Type	Example	Frequency	Percentage
G8(D)	*listened any songs*	91	24%
L1	*say a lie*	61	16%
L2	*a hard disease*	56	15%
G4	*at high school*	41	11%
G1	*have experiences on working at a hotel*	25	7%
G8(MNS)	*I felt boring*	15	4%
G5	*I was amazed about*	14	4%
G8(EH)	*They didn't want the teacher realize*	14	4%
L3	* The film talks about a young boy*	13	3%
L4	*a cup of coffee*	11	3%

Type	Examples	Frequency	Percentage
L6	*Many familiar problems of student life are shown deeply*	10	3%
G8(GJK)	*I would appreciate to discuss the application with you*	6	2%
G8(FI)	*We will eating* *It made me suddenly thought*	6	2%
G8 (ABCO)	*buy something new to me*	4	1%
G2	*take a chance tasting some specialties*	3	1%
G8(LQ)	*Her doctor suggested her to write about her daily activities*	3	1%
L5	*The food there is extra fresh*	2	1%

Additionally, if the G8 types were combined, these types became the most frequent errors. Figure 4.3 shows the percentage of G8 collocational error types made up to 37%.
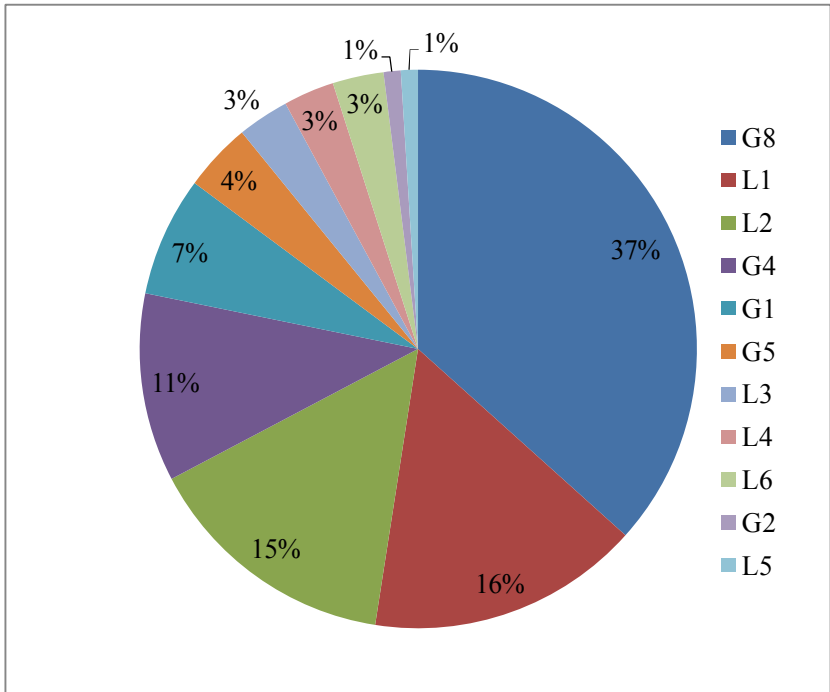
Figure 4.3 Ratio of Collocational Errors in the Participants' Writing (G8 Types Combined)

As for the top three types in collocational errors-D-pattern verbs (V+ Prep+O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O), MNS- pattern verbs (V+ O+ to be+ C/ V+ O+ C/ V+ C), and EH-pattern verbs (V+ to Inf./ V+ O+ to Inf.), the percentages of these three error types were 65%, 11% and 10% respectively, shown in Figure 4.4.
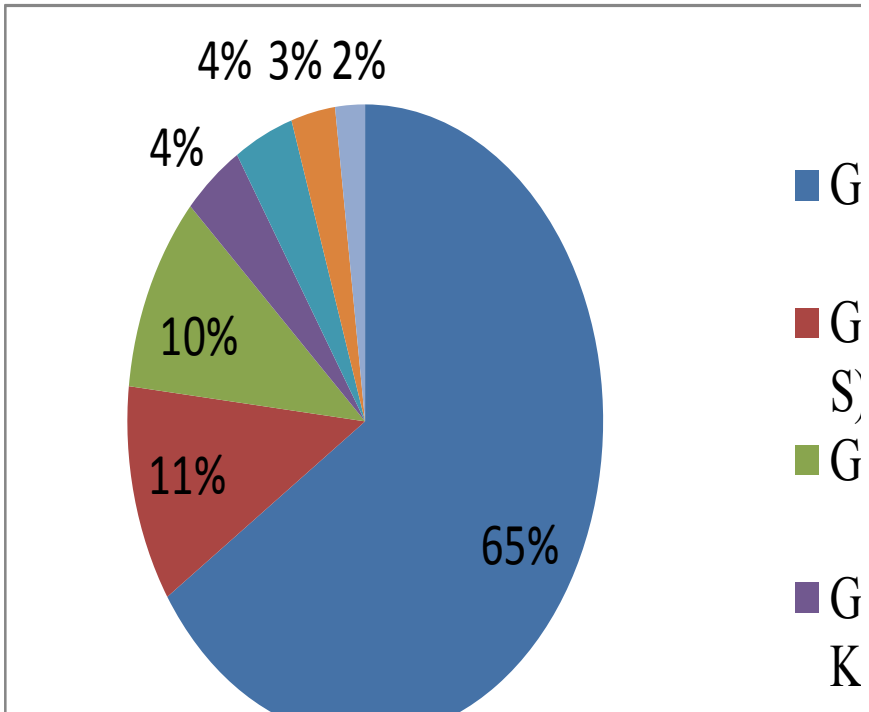
Figure 4.4 Ratio of G8 Collocational Error Types in the Participants' Writing

4.1.3. Sources of Collocational Errors

a. False Concepts Hypothesized

False concepts hypothesized errors result from learners' faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language. Therefore, the participants made errors such as *doing presentation* instead of *making presentation,* or *having any mistakes* instead of *making any mistakes.* These errors were shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Collocational Errors Resulting from
False Concepts Hypothesized

Type	Learner Collocations	Target Collocations
L1	Now, I'm more confident in speaking in public after <u>*doing presentation*</u> a couple of times. I sang the song roundly without <u>*having any mistakes.*</u>	Now, I'm more confident in speaking in public after <u>*making presentation*</u> a couple of times. I sang the song beautifully without <u>*making any mistakes*</u>.

b. Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization means that "it generally involves the creation of a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language." (Richards [57, p. 174]). Table 4.5 shows one source of collocational errors, overgeneralization, such as *felt boring* is a mixed structure of (*one thing*) *is boring* and (*someone*) *is bored with (something)*; * *I am enjoy* is based on a combination of *I enjoy* and *I am enjoying*

Table 4.5 Collocational Errors Resulting from Overgeneralization

Type	Learner Collocations	Target Collocations
G8(MNS)	I <u>*felt boring*</u>.	I <u>*felt bored.*</u>
L3	*<u>I am enjoy</u>* in a journey...	*<u>I enjoy</u>* the journey ...

c. The use of a synonym

The use of a synonym for a lexical item in a collocation is seen as a "straightforward application of the open choice principle" (Farghal & Obiedat [22]). Table 4.6 is a list of errors resulting from the misuse of synonym.

Table 4.6 Collocational Errors Resulting from the Use of Synonym

Type	Learner Collocations	Target Collocations
L1	We are *saying lies* for the benefit of whoever gave us the unwanted gift.	We are *telling lies* for the benefit of whoever gave us the unwanted gift.
L2	The film is worth seeing because it is a *realistic story*.	The film is worth seeing because it is a *true story*.

d. Ignorance of Rule Restrictions

Errors of ignorance of rule restrictions were the result of analogy and failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures (Richards [57]). Table 4.7 shows the errors of ignorance of rule restrictions in the participants' writing.

Table 4.7 Collocational Errors Resulting from
Ignorance of Rule Restrictions

Type	Learner Collocations	Target Collocations
L2	It also gives me *many* useful *information*.	It also gives me *much* useful *information*.
G8 (D)	My mom was *smiling with* me.	My mom was *smiling at* me.

e. Negative Transfer

Previous studies (Bahns [3]; Liu [40]; and Wang [66]) proposed that learners' first language influenced their production on collocations and was the common source of errors. The examples were shown in Table 4.8, which indicated a serious problem in the use of verbs.

Table 4.8 Collocational Errors Resulting from Negative Transfer

Type	Learner Collocations	Target Collocations
L1	I started *learning* a Spanish *course* last month.	I started *taking* a Spanish *course* last month.
L4	You also have an occasion to enjoy *a cup coffee* in the morning.	You also have an occasion to enjoy *a cup of coffee* in the morning.
G8 (D)	I rarely *listen any songs* on this channel.	I rarely *listen to any songs* on this channel.

f. Approximation

Approximation means that learners use an incorrect vocabulary item or structure, which "shares enough semantic features in common with the desire item to satisfy the speaker" (Tarone [62], cited in Liu [39, p. 491]). Table 4.9 shows a list of errors resulting from approximation.

Table 4.9 Collocational Errors Resulting from Approximation

Type	Learner Collocations	Target Collocations
L2	I am going to spend the first week doing *simply things* at home.	I am going to spend the first week doing *simple things* at home.
G1	This thing made us *burst into laugh*.	This thing made us *burst into laughter*.

Table 4.10 shows that 64.6% of collocational errors were attributable to four kinds of intralingual transfer, including overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, false concepts, and the use of synonym. With regard to interlingual transfer or negative transfer, it brought about 35.4 % of the total errors. Of the seven types of strategies employed, ignorance of rule restrictions was the biggest source of collocational errors because it brought about 46.3% of the total errors. Of the two types of transfer, more collocational errors resulted from intralingual transfer than interlingual transfer. Only 4.3% of the collocational errors resulted from approximation.

Table 4.10 Rates of the Sources of Collocational Errors
Identified in the Study

Cognitive Strategies	Intralingual Transfer	False Concept Hypothesized	11	2.9 %
		Overgeneralization	26	6.9 %
		The Use of Synonym	32	8.5 %
		Ignorance of Rule Restrictions	174	46.3 %
	Interlingual Transfer	Negative Transfer	117	31.1 %
Communication Strategies	Paraphrase	Approximation	16	4.3 %
		Word coinage	0	0%

4.2. DISCUSSIONS

In terms of the participants' errors in grammatical and lexical collocations, it was found that the participants made more grammatical errors (223:59.3%) than lexical errors (153:40.7%) in the present study. As to the frequency of 376 collocational errors, prepositional collocations in general and G8 (D) (V+ Prep+ O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O) collocations in particular made the most problematic types of collocation for Vietnamese learners of English (24%).

In terms of the sources of collocational errors, the ignorance of rule restrictions (46.3%) and negative transfer (31.1%) were the two main sources of those collocational errors in the writing of

participants. The reason of this result may be due to the fact that the participants do not know how to collocate prepositions with other verbs, nouns or adjectives correctly. In other words, the participants lack collocational competence in prepositions. Furthermore, participants were adversely affected by their mother language in the written use of collocations. This may be because the learners are thinking in their native language when they are writing. Thus when they do not know the exact word or the correct item, they try to transfer it from their first language.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the current study showed that three hundred and seventy six collocational errors were found in the participants' writing samples. Of 376 collocational errors, it was shown that there were more grammatical collocational errors (223) than lexical collocational errors (153) in the participants' writing samples.

In terms of types of collocational errors occurring in the participants' writings, the results reported that seventeen types of 376 collocational errors occurred including L1 (V+ N), L2 (Adj+ N), L3 (N + V), L4 (N of N), L5 (Adv + Adj), L6 (V+ Adv), G1 (N+ Prep), G2 (N + to Inf), G4 (Prep+ N), G5 (Adj+ Prep), G8 (ABCO) (V + direct O + to + indirect O = V + indirect O + to + direct O/ V + direct O + to + indirect O / V + direct O + for + indirect O = V + indirect O + direct O / V + O1 + O2), G8 (D) (V+ Prep +O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O),

G8 (EH) (V+ to Inf./ V+ O+ to Inf.), G8 (FI) (V+ bare Inf./ V+ O + bare Inf.), G8 (GJK) (V+ V-ing/ V+ O+ V-ing/ V+ a possessive and V-ing) , G8 (LQ) (V + that clause/ V + (O) + wh-clause/ wh-phrase) and G8 (MNS) (V+ O + to be+ C/ V+ O + C/ V+ C).

With respect to the frequency of collocational error types, it was revealed that the types of G8 (D) (V+ Prep +O/ V+ O+ Prep+ O) and L1 (V+ N) errors occurred frequently in the participants' writing samples.

In terms of the sources of collocational errors, five types of cognitive strategies such as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, false concepts hypothesized, the use of synonym, and negative transfer. One communication strategy, approximation, was found. Ignorance of rule restrictions was the major source of collocational errors because it brought about 46.3% of the total errors.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

5.2.1. Raising Learners' Awareness of Collocations

Raising learners' awareness of collocations helps learners learn more efficiently and effectively, and produce collocations more accurately in their English writings.

5.2.2. Reinforcing Learners' Concept of Collocations

In terms of reinforcing students' concept of collocations, EFL teachers need to recommend dictionaries to their students which consist of common collocations, corpora and concordancing programs.

5.2.3. Increasing Students' Collocational Competence in L2

Hill [26] suggested that EFL teachers should make students more collocationally competent with words regardless of the difficulties. Only spending more time exploring words and their collocates and recording them systematically, students can be more skilled at producing acceptable collocations in writing.

5.2.4. Avoiding Literal Translation

EFL teachers may try to encourage learners to translate chunk to chunk or collocations to collocations, and seek parallel equivalents in L2 and L2 (Liu [39]).

5.2.5. Developing teaching materials

Apart from language teachers, materials developers play a significant part in most language programs. They need to revise existing materials so as to take the multi-word units into consideration.

5.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Firstly, the study was small scale in nature constitutes the first limitation of the present study. Thus, further research should be conducted on a larger scale in different areas in Vietnam and other EFL contexts to further explore the issues addressed here.

Secondly, in this study the analysis of learners' collocational use and errors was only based on their written production, hence there is a possibility of the learners' collocational use and errors caused by factors other than their lack of actual linguistic competence. Therefore, the investigation of the learners' collocational use and errors in their oral production would yield more

reliable results and reveal the true picture of their collocational repertoire.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

With the limitation of the thesis, the study still remains some aspects can be dealt with in further studies in the domain of collocations:

1. An investigation into collocational errors in oral production of second-year students of University of Foreign Language Studies - The University of Danang.

2. An investigation into collocational errors in the writing of advanced EFL learners at University of Foreign Language Studies-The University of Danang.

3. An investigation into the use of collocations by EFL learners at University of Foreign Language Studies - The University of Danang.

4. An investigation into major sources of collocational errors made by EFL learners at University of Foreign Language Studies - The University of Danang.