

Collocations of Light Verb Make in Chinese Master Theses

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Abstract: Light verbs can confuse many non-native English learners due to their vagueness and the vast array of collocates they can occur with. To shed light on this issue, the current study employs Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA) to examine the collocations of the light verb "make" and the types of errors made by Chinese advanced EFL learners in two self-built corpora of Chinese and American theses for Master's Degree. The study yields three key findings. Firstly, Chinese learners tend to overuse collocations with "make" in it while underutilizing collocates with verbs that denote behavior. Secondly, the unique collocations Chinese learners use are often associated with research and academic writing. Finally, Chinese learners frequently misuse "make" as other light or lexical verbs. These errors may be attributed to insufficient knowledge of light verbs, limited awareness of the varied uses of "make," and an overemphasis on formal expressions in theses.

Keywords: Collocation, Light verb, Master theses, Corpus-based study

I. Introduction

Research Background

The appropriate use of collocations is widely recognized as a key component of language proficiency, as it enables native-like and idiomatic speech (Nation, 1990). Collocations involving light verbs have been a topic of linguistic research (Kearns, 1998) for decades (Mehl, 2017), with definitions evolving alongside the development of the field. A light verb is defined as a verb that has a general meaning on its own (e.g., *make* or *do*) but expresses a more precise or complex meaning when combined with another word, typically a noun, and they frequently collocate with nouns. Although light verbs have little semantic meaning on their own, they share the meaning of their noun collocates, and their collocations are semantically equivalent to a lexical verb.

Numerous empirical studies have investigated the collocations of *make* and other light verbs, with some scholars, such as Hasselgren (2007), finding that non-native English speakers tend to overuse collocations of light verbs, while others, such as Deng (2005), have identified instances of underuse among Chinese students for certain light verb collocations, such as *do*, *give*, and *have*.

Make is one of English learners' most frequently used and earliest acquired light verbs, and its collocational uses have been extensively studied. Researchers, such as Sternberg (2001), have identified all eight usages of *make*, including its usage as a light verb. Zhang (2011) has further elaborated on the types of collocations and

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collocations involving *make*, applying the classification to their analysis.

Recent literature provides valuable insights into the collocations of the light verb *make*. Miao and Sun (2005) found that Chinese non-English majors may misuse the light verb *make*, but senior students tend to make fewer mistakes. Hu and Liu (2016) revealed an essential characteristic of *make* collocations: they often express verbal behaviors, such as *making an argument* or *making comments*. These studies demonstrate the importance of understanding the appropriate use of light verb collocations for language learners to achieve native-like proficiency.

Significance of the Study

While previous research has extensively analyzed and discussed the usage of *make* as a lexical verb, fewer studies have focused on its usage and collocations as a light verb. Additionally, foreign empirical studies have mainly examined the English acquisition of non-native speakers with different mother tongues and the characteristics of usage by native English speakers. At the same time, domestic scholars have primarily focused on the acquisition of Chinese undergraduates, including comparisons of students of different grades and majors. However, the mastery of light verb collocations by Chinese English majors, particularly in their master's theses, has not been studied in much detail. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the exploration of the collocations of *make*, particularly as a light verb used in the master's theses of Chinese students majoring in Linguistics.

Overall, this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature by providing a detailed analysis of the collocations of *make* as a light verb used by Chinese English majors in their master's theses. The study's findings can help language learners, teachers, and curriculum designers better to understand the appropriate use of light verb collocations and facilitate their acquisition of native-like proficiency in English.

II. Literature Review

Theories of Light Verbs

Research on light verbs can be traced back to Poutsma's (1926) concept of group verbs, which refer to certain transitive verbs whose entire construction is semantically equivalent to a verb related to their direct object. Jespersen (1954) further distinguished the semantic meaning of *have* as lighter than that of *walk* in phrases such as *have a walk* and coined the term *light verb*. He defined light verbs as constructions that offer an easy way of adding descriptive traits in the form of an adjunct, such as *have a delightful walk* and *have a quiet smoke* (ibid: page).

The definition of light verbs evolved when Chomsky (1981) proposed that most transitive verbs are light and should be categorized as a functional genre. Later, he also included verbs of causative use as light verbs. Larson (1988) found that light verbs are mostly trivalent verbs under the requirement of early Transformational-Generative Grammar. Wen (2007) reclassified traditional light verbs from a syntactic perspective and divided them into light verbs, proto-verbs, and auxiliary verbs, arguing that light verbs only have syntactic forms but no semantic content. Zhang (2013) proposed that the existence of light verbs depends on the complex meaning of verbs and that trivalent verb structures can also function as light verbs.

As delexicalization became increasingly common in English, it was found that the more frequent the words

were, the more likely they were to be used delexically (Biber, 1999). The theories of progressive delexicalization and shared meaning mechanism hold that context and vocabulary are semantically inseparable (Sinclair, 1991). This led to a widely accepted definition of light verbs as frequently used verbs with little semantic meaning and heavily rely on the nouns they collocate with due to delexicalization (Gui, 2007). One defining characteristic of light verbs is that their collocations are semantically equivalent to their direct object and can be replaced by a lexical verb (Mehl, 2017). For example, in the collocation "make a choice," "make" is a light verb, and the whole collocation is semantically equivalent to the lexical verb "choose." In contrast, *make a law* is neither equivalent to a lexical verb nor a collocation of the light verb *make*.

In general, the development of theories on light verbs has been a gradual process, with researchers building on the work of their predecessors and refining definitions based on new findings. The current understanding of light verbs is that they are frequently used, semantically light, and heavily reliant on their collocates, and their collocations are semantically equivalent to their direct object and can be replaced by a lexical verb. These characteristics are an essential component of language proficiency for the correct use of light verbs.

Research on Collocations of Light Verbs

Collocations are crucial for language acquisition but can be challenging for English learners, even at an advanced level. Research has been conducted on the collocations of typical light verbs, including *do*, *have*, *take*, and *get*. Light verbs have been compared to lexical teddy bears, as they tend to cling to familiar words, resulting in overuse (Hasselgren, 2007). The feature of light verbs possessing little semantic meaning also contributes to this phenomenon.

An eye-tracking experiment and questionnaire revealed that native speakers do not categorize collocations of light verbs, such as *giving a kiss*, as either two-role or three-role events. Instead, these collocations are often treated as intermediate between the two (Wittenberg, 2017). Comparing the usages of collocations of light verbs, such as *make*, *take*, and *give*, across languages, studies have found high consistency between Singapore, Hong Kong, and British English and that the degree of lightness of *give* is higher than that of *make* or *take* (Mehl, 2017).

In English language teaching materials, both domestic and international, there is a lack of collocations of the light verb *do* and a lack of diversity in the noun collocates used (Xie, 2010). In argumentative writing by Chinese English major undergraduates, a study found that senior university students made fewer errors concerning the light verb *have* (Zhu, 2019).

To sum up, studies on collocations of light verbs have shed light on the challenges that learners face in acquiring the appropriate use of these constructions. The overuse of light verbs is common among non-native speakers, and their little semantic meaning can contribute to this issue. Studies have also investigated how native speakers process and categorize collocations of light verbs, revealing fascinating insights into their cognitive processing of language. Additionally, cross-linguistic studies have explored the consistency of collocations of light verbs in different varieties of English. Finally, research on English language teaching materials has identified gaps in the coverage of light verb collocations and the need for greater diversity in noun collocates. These studies demonstrate the significance of understanding the appropriate use of light verb collocations for language learners to achieve native-like proficiency in English.

Research on Light Verb Make

Make is a versatile verb with many uses, including delexicalized, causative, and productive uses. Studies have focused on the overall usage of *make*, and its collocations have been investigated in various contexts. However, relatively few studies focus exclusively on the collocations of the light verb *make*.

Research has shown that English learners in France and Sweden often use *make* incorrectly due to negative interlanguage transfer from their mother tongues (Sternberg & Granger, 2001). The light verb constructions of *make* include *make a distinction*, *make a decision*, and *make a reform*, among others. Studies have classified all usages of *make* into eight categories. A study of Chinese English majors' writing found that the three most used usages of *make* were causative uses, delexicalized uses, and productive uses (Zhang, 2002). Native English speakers commonly use nouns such as *argument*, *claim*, *point*, *statement*, *remark*, and *observation* to express verbal behaviors, but Chinese students seldom use such nouns in *make* constructions. The degree of lightness of *make* affects its collocations. The 20 most common noun collocations of *make* in COBUILD corpus were divided into three categories: ordinary nouns, nominalized words, and fixed phrases (Wei, 2007). Nominalized word structures are light verbs, and their meaning can only be understood through specific collocates, such as *make discrimination* means *discriminate* and *make sowings* means to *sow*. Research has also compared the collocations of *make* in argumentative writing by Chinese and US undergraduates, revealing differences in the preferred structures and complexity of the collocations used (Zhang, 2011). Chinese students tend to rely heavily on more straightforward phrases such as *make a decision*, failing to master light verbs, or more complicated expressions.

Studies have also investigated the overuse of *make* by Chinese non-English major students, who often mismatch light verbs with the nouns in their collocations and over-generalize their usage. They also tend to use higher delexicalization words like *make* in place of core lexical meanings of other light verbs such as *get* and *give* (Miao & Sun, 2005). In interpreting press conferences, *make* collocates with nominalized nouns such as *make a promise* or *make a remark*, which often expresses verbal behaviors and make sense in Chinese (Hu & Liu, 2016).

Although there has been research on the overall usage of *make*, relatively few studies have focused exclusively on its collocations as a light verb. Therefore, the current paper is designed to study the collocations of light verb *make* through investigating master theses written by Chinese and American English majors. Two research questions will be investigated and answered in the paper:

- (1) Compared with native speakers, what are the features of the collocations of light verb *make* used by Chinese graduate students?
- (2) What types of errors do Chinese graduate students make regarding the collocations of light verb *make*?

III. Methodology

Corpora Building and Data Collection

The Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA) method was employed to address the research questions. CIA is used (e.g. XXX) to compare or contrast the behavior of non-native speakers and native speakers in

comparable circumstances. There are two types of comparisons in CIA: comparing the learner language with the native language or the languages of different learners. This study adopts the former type by comparing the reference corpus of native speakers with the interlanguage corpus of Chinese graduate students to reveal the features of English used by these learners.

Two corpora were created for this study: the Chinese Master Theses Corpus (CMTC) and the American Master Theses Corpus (AMTC). CMTC comprises 30 theses written by Chinese graduate students downloaded from CNKI, one of China's largest and most comprehensive databases of academic writings. AMTC comprises 30 American theses from the ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database, one of the largest databases of master's and doctoral theses from universities worldwide. All the theses are papers on Linguistics to control for the scope of subjects.

To ensure the representativeness of the corpora, 30 Chinese theses were selected from 27 universities in mainland China, taking into account both comprehensive schools (e.g., Shanghai Jiaotong University and Sun Yat-sen University) and those specialized in foreign language studies (e.g., Shanghai International Studies University and Sichuan International Studies University), as well as different regions. The theses are from 16 provinces and cities in China, including nine from regions in East China, four from South China, four from West China, six from North China, and seven from Central China.

The 30 American theses were chosen from 21 universities without limiting them to specific types or regions. To ensure that native speakers of English wrote the theses, the surnames of the 30 authors were checked on Surname Database: Index of Surnames (surnamedb.com) and www.ancestry.com.

Theses that studied the constructions of the light verb *make* and used many collocations of *make* as examples were excluded from the selection. Theses that analyzed errors were also not chosen, as they may have included many instances of the usage of making errors, which could have influenced the results of the study. After selection, each thesis was copied and cleaned in a word processor, with acknowledgments, contents, tables, citations, and references deleted. They were then converted into text format. CMTC is a corpus of 465,899 tokens, while AMTC is a corpus of 426,044 tokens.

Therefore, the corpora were carefully selected to ensure their representativeness and to control for confounding factors. The use of CIA and the construction of these corpora will enable a detailed analysis of the collocations of the light verb *make* in the writing of Chinese and American English graduate students.

Procedures of Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures involved the use of AntConc 3.5.8.0, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit that provides functions such as concordance, collocates, and word lists. A Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA) was carried out by comparing the Chinese Master Theses Corpus (CMTC) and the American Master Theses Corpus (AMTC) to identify the tendencies of overuse of the light verb *make*. The procedures are as follows:

First, the words were tagged with their parts of speech, and concordance lines that contained various usages of *make* were generated using the Concordance function in AntConc. The significance of the two frequency data sets was calculated using Log Likelihood (LL) tests. If the results of LL tests were higher than 6.6 with significance scores lower than 0.01, it indicated a tendency of overuse of *make*.

Second, the concordance lines were manually filtered with the assistance of tags, and the raw frequencies of collocations of the light verb *make* and other collocations were obtained. Proper noun phrases of *make*, such as *make contextual positioning* or *meaning-making system*, were deleted because they were topic-related and could not represent the general features of *make* in a light verb construction. Top collocations were obtained based on their frequency ranking.

Third, statistically significant collocations were identified using the *Collocates* function in *AntConc*. The words *make*, *makes*, *made*, *making*, and their tags were input in *AntConc* to query noun collocates. The nouns were ranked based on their Mutual Information (MI) scores. The collocations were deemed statistically significant if the MI scores were above 6.0. Unique noun collocates in the corpora were identified by comparing the significant collocations of the two corpora. Finally, errors were identified in *CMTC* and classified based on the types of noun collocates.

Identification

Identification of Collocations of the Light Verb *Make*

As per the literature review, a collocation of a light verb is semantically equivalent to its direct object and can be replaced by a lexical verb. Light verbs usually collocate with nouns, and *make* is one such light verb used delexically, with little semantic meaning. It heavily relies on the meaning of its noun collocates. For instance, the phrase *make a law* cannot be replaced by a lexical verb because *make* means producing results, so it cannot be considered a light verb construction of *make*. However, *make a choice* can express the same meaning as the lexical verb *choose*. Similarly, *make comments* equals *comment*, and *make an adaptation* equals *adapt*. Since lexical verbs can replace these phrases, they can be considered collocations of the light verb *make*.

Identification of Errors in *CMTC*

Possible erroneous noun collocates were checked in the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary of English (freecollocation.com). The nouns were searched to see which verbs frequently collocate with them in English and collocation dictionaries. The collocations were considered erroneous if *make* was not suggested as a collocate.

IV. Results and Discussion

Frequency of *make*

Table 1 presents the frequencies and normalized frequencies (per 100,000 tokens) of *make* in the two corpora. It is evident from the table that in *CMTC*, there were 1201 instances of *make*, with 598 of them used in collocations as a light verb, whereas, in *AMTC*, there were 606 instances of *make*, with 299 of them used in collocations as a light verb. The normalized frequency data in Table 1 indicates that *make* is used more frequently in *CMTC*, both in collocations as a light verb and in other usages.

Table 1 Frequency of *make* in *CMTC* and *AMTC*

| CMTC | AMTC | LL | P |
|------|------|----|---|
|------|------|----|---|

| Types of <i>make</i> | Frequency | Norm. Frequency | Frequency | Norm. Frequency | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------|------|
| Light Verb <i>make</i> | 598 | 128.4 | 299 | 70.2 | 76.65 | 0.00 |
| All usages of <i>make</i> | 1201 | 257.8 | 606 | 142.2 | 150.025 | 0.00 |

It is demonstrated that the statistics of LL tests indicate that CMTC had significantly more collocations of *make*, both as a light verb and a general verb, compared to AMTC. The frequency results show that Chinese graduate students majoring in Linguistics tend to overuse *make* in their theses. This suggests that they may face challenges in correctly using *make* collocations, despite their expected proficiency in academic English and potential knowledge of the collocations of the light verb *make*.

Semantic Analysis of High-frequency Noun Collocates

In CMTC, 118 different nouns collocated with the light verb *make*, whereas, in AMTC, only 76 nouns were used. The differences in noun collocates between the two corpora exist not only in quantity but also in the type of nouns used.

Among the 20 most frequent noun collocates, Chinese theses used nouns such as *choice*, *study*, *analysis*, and *contribution* more frequently, while American theses used *decision*, *sense*, *distinction*, and *statement* more often. Two types of frequent nouns were most differently used in the corpora: nouns related to conducting research and academic writing and nouns expressing verbal behaviors.

Regarding the former type of nouns, it was observed that Chinese graduate students used many collocations related to research, such as *make a study*, *make an analysis*, and *make errors*. Among the 20 most frequently used nouns in each corpus, nine were associated with research and academic writing in CMTC, whereas only five were used in AMTC. Table 2 lists these nouns according to their frequency.

Table 2 Frequent Noun Collocates Related to Research and Academic Writing in CMTC and AMTC

| CMTC | | AMTC | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
| Nouns | Frequency | Nouns | Frequency |
| <i>study</i> | 36 | <i>prediction</i> | 12 |
| <i>analysis</i> | 29 | <i>comparison</i> | 10 |
| <i>error</i> | 20 | <i>reference</i> | 9 |

| | | | |
|-------------------|----|-----------------------|---|
| <i>comparison</i> | 19 | <i>generalization</i> | 6 |
| <i>research</i> | 18 | <i>conclusion</i> | 4 |
| <i>conclusion</i> | 14 | | |
| <i>definition</i> | 12 | | |
| <i>mistake</i> | 9 | | |
| <i>reference</i> | 8 | | |

In contrast, Chinese students used fewer nouns related to verbal behaviors, while American students frequently used such nouns in collocations of the light verb *make*, such as *make a statement*, *make a mention*, *make an argument*, and *make comments*. Given that verbal behaviors are the most significant feature of collocations of the light verb *make*, the results showed that Chinese students could have used more nouns of this type, even though they were overusing *make* in general. Table 3 presents specific nouns and their frequencies.

Table 3 Frequent Noun Collocates of Verbal Behaviors in CMTC and AMTC

| CMTC | | AMTC | |
|---------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| collocation | Frequency | Nouns | Frequency |
| <i>appeal</i> | 10 | <i>statement</i> | 15 |
| <i>claim</i> | 8 | <i>claim</i> | 7 |
| | | <i>mention</i> | 7 |
| | | <i>argument</i> | 5 |
| | | <i>comment</i> | 5 |

Unique Noun Collocates in the Corpora

The two corpora present 29 statistically significant noun collocates in CMTC and 15 in AMTC. Among the 15 most significant noun collocates of the light verb *make* in each corpus, Chinese graduate students use fewer collocates expressing verbal behaviors. In AMTC, four collocations of the light verb are equivalent to verbs expressing verbal behaviors, such as *make a mention* equals *mention*, *make a claim* equals *claim*, *make a statement* equals *state*, and *make an argument* equals *argue*. However, none of the 15 collocates in CMTC express verbal behaviors. Table 4 presents each corpus's 15 most significant collocates, ranked by MI scores.

Table 4 Top Significant Collocates of Light Verb Make in CMTC and AMTC

| CMTC | MI | AMTC | MI |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| <i>prediction</i> | 11.63 | <i>contribution</i> | 11.02 |
| <i>decision</i> | 11.47 | <i>decision</i> | 10.55 |
| <i>adjustment</i> | 11.37 | <i>sense</i> | 10.07 |
| <i>plan</i> | 10.63 | <i>prediction</i> | 9.05 |
| <i>inference</i> | 10.25 | <i>distinction</i> | 8.78 |
| <i>effort</i> | 10.25 | <i>mention</i> | 8.67 |
| <i>reference</i> | 10.23 | <i>claim</i> | 8.61 |
| <i>judgment</i> | 10.23 | <i>statement</i> | 8.34 |
| <i>comparison</i> | 10.12 | <i>distinction</i> | 8.22 |
| <i>contribution</i> | 10.11 | <i>choice</i> | 7.85 |
| <i>preparation</i> | 10.05 | <i>reference</i> | 7.79 |
| <i>distinction</i> | 9.83 | <i>comparison</i> | 7.31 |
| <i>attempt</i> | 9.33 | <i>change</i> | 7.28 |
| <i>progress</i> | 9.31 | <i>argument</i> | 7.06 |
| <i>choice</i> | 9.15 | <i>point</i> | 6.26 |

Upon further analysis, it can be concluded that although Chinese graduate students have shown improvement in reducing their overuse of the verb *make* and its associated constructions, there is still a need to increase their awareness of collocating nouns with verbs that reflect specific behaviors. Furthermore, while some noun collocates were used in both corpora, such as *analysis* and *research*, there were several unique collocates in the Chinese Master's Thesis Corpus (CMTC), including *attempt*, *achievement*, *utterance*, *conclusion*, and *discussion*. This highlights the significance of these particular collocates in the written work of

Chinese students, as demonstrated in Table 5 below:

Table 5 Unique Significant Collocations in CMTC and Their Alternative Lexical Verbs

| Collocations as a Light Verb | Alternative Lexical Verbs |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>make improvement</i> | <i>to improve</i> |
| <i>make an attempt</i> | <i>to attempt</i> |
| <i>make an achievement</i> | <i>to achieve</i> |
| <i>make a negotiation</i> | <i>to negotiate</i> |
| <i>make a summary</i> | <i>to summarize</i> |
| <i>make an utterance</i> | <i>to utter</i> |
| <i>make a conclusion</i> | <i>to conclude</i> |
| <i>make a discussion</i> | <i>to discuss</i> |

The results suggest three possible reasons for the overuse of *make* and its collocations in Chinese graduate students' writing. Firstly, it was found that American students commonly used alternative collocations such as *draw a conclusion* or *have a discussion*, which could explain why these collocations were more significant in CMTC and may have contributed to Chinese students' overuse tendency of *make*.

Secondly, it is possible that Chinese students intentionally used more formal and objective expressions in their theses, resulting in greater use of passive voice and noun collocations. Concordance lines from CMTC provide examples of this, such as the use of *attempt* and *achievement* as the subjects of sentences. This may be because students consider using nouns as subjects to be more objective and the passive voice to be more formal.

Thirdly, some nouns were found to be closely related to the topics of the theses in CMTC and, therefore could only collocate with *make* even though there may have been semantically equivalent lexical verbs. For instance, in the sentence, *Would you mind turning down the radio?*, *made the utterance* could have been replaced by the single verb *utter*, but since the thesis focused on sentences spoken by English learners, emphasis was placed on the specific content of the utterance rather than the action of uttering.

Error Analysis

The analysis of errors made by Chinese graduate students revealed two main categories: mistaking *make* for other light verbs and using *make* as a substitute for lexical verbs. In the first type of error, students often confuse *make* with other light verbs such as *have*, *give*, *get*, and *do*. Because delexicalized verbs in light verb constructions have little semantic meaning, even graduate students in China may struggle to collocate nouns

with the appropriate light verb properly. Furthermore, since *make* is one of the earliest learned light verbs for most Chinese students, they may feel more comfortable using *make* than other light verbs. Table 6 below lists examples of nouns from CMTC and the expected light verbs:

Table 6 Erroneous Collocates and Expected Light Verbs from OCD and BNC*

| Verbs | Nouns |
|-------------|------------------------|
| <i>have</i> | <i>expectation</i> |
| | <i>conversation</i> |
| | <i>understanding</i> |
| | <i>answer</i> |
| | <i>communication</i> |
| <i>give</i> | <i>dedication</i> |
| | <i>influence</i> |
| | <i>description</i> |
| | <i>performance</i> |
| | <i>clarification</i> |
| <i>get</i> | <i>feedback</i> |
| | <i>illustration</i> |
| | <i>acknowledgement</i> |
| <i>do</i> | <i>confirmation</i> |
| | <i>preparation</i> |
| | <i>revision</i> |

*OCD refers to Oxford Collocation Dictionary, and BNC refers to British Nation Corpus

In the second category of errors, many nouns are not expected to collocate with *make*, let alone as a light verb. Instead, these nouns more commonly collocate with lexical verbs, as shown in Table 7. The misuse of *make* in these cases may be due to its lexical usage. For example, *make* in *make money* shares the semantic meaning of *earn* or *gain*, so students may confuse this usage with that of a light verb and collocate *promotion* with *make* rather than *gain*. Similarly, students may misuse *make* as *cause* because *make* in *make sb. believe sth.* or *make sth. possible* shares a similar semantic meaning to the lexical verb *cause*, similar to the causative usage of *make*. As a result, students may write phrases such as *make speculations* and *make misunderstandings* but fail to recognize the differences between *make* and *cause* and the appropriate verbs to collocate with various nouns. Evidently, the proper use of *make* as a light verb versus a lexical verb, and the appropriate collocations with various nouns, may not be precise enough for students. Table 7 below provides examples of nouns more commonly collocated with lexical verbs rather than *make*.

Table 7 Nouns in Erroneous Collocations and Expected Lexical Verbs from OCD and BNC*

| Verbs | Nouns |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>carry out</i> | <i>explanation</i> |
| <i>carry out</i> | <i>investigation</i> |
| <i>carry out</i> | <i>inquiry</i> |
| <i>conduct</i> | <i>negotiation</i> |
| <i>find</i> | <i>expression</i> |
| <i>indicate</i> | <i>presence</i> |
| <i>gain</i> | <i>promotion</i> |
| <i>cause</i> | <i>speculation</i> |
| <i>cause</i> | <i>misunderstanding</i> |
| <i>reach</i> | <i>agreement</i> |
| <i>strike</i> | <i>balance</i> |
| <i>enter</i> | <i>negotiation</i> |

*OCD refers to Oxford Collocation Dictionary and BNC refers to British Nation Corpus

V. Conclusion

Major Findings and Implications

This paper presents three major findings regarding the use of *make* and its collocations by Chinese English major graduate students in their theses. The first finding is that Chinese students tend to overuse *make* and its collocations as a light verb. Two main features of this overuse were identified: firstly, students relied heavily on *make* and ignored other light verbs or lexical verbs that could collocate with the same nouns, as evidenced by their use in AMTC. Secondly, nouns of verbal behaviors were underused, suggesting that students may not be fully aware of typical collocations or the usage of *make* as a light verb.

The second finding is that some overused collocations are intended to be formal and objective. Chinese students tend to use more passive voice and noun collocates with *make* in academic writing, likely due to academic writing class requirements and the irreplaceability of certain collocations containing topic-related nouns with single lexical verbs.

The third finding is that two errors were observed in Chinese master theses: misusing *make* as other light verbs, and misusing *make* as lexical verbs. These errors may be due to the frequent use of light verbs with little semantic meaning and the similarity between *make* and some lexical verbs' usages.

These findings affect how Chinese advanced English learners understand and use *make* and its collocations. The high frequency and delexicalization of *make* may lead students to think it can be used more liberally than other verbs. Additionally, the misuses of other light verbs and lexical verbs suggest that students may struggle to distinguish between different collocations and that their expressions may lack idiomaticity in using light verbs. To address this issue, English learners may benefit from using corpora or collocation dictionaries to find alternative verbs that collocate with different nouns and avoid the overuse of *make*.

In conclusion, this study highlights the challenges that Chinese graduate students, who are also English majors, face in using *make* and its collocations appropriately in academic writing. The findings suggest that students need to be more aware of the typical collocations and usages of *make* as a light verb and the differences between *make* and other light or lexical verbs. By doing so, they can improve the idiomaticity and accuracy of their written expression in academic writing.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the small sample size of the two corpora containing 60 theses limited the data collection process. This may impact the reliability of the results. Additionally, the filtering of concordance lines may be less reliable due to the lack of expertise and nativeness of the researchers involved in this process.

Secondly, the representativeness of the two corpora is also a limitation. The types of American universities and their regions were not strictly controlled due to accessibility issues. Moreover, the topics of the theses in both corpora were diverse, which may affect the generalizability of the results.

Thirdly, the current study's method may not completely explain why and how students collocated these nouns with *make*. While the corpus-based approach is practical, it does not reveal the reasoning behind students' choices.

Therefore, future research should address these limitations. Firstly, larger sample sizes and the involvement of experts in the filtering process can improve the reliability of the results. Secondly, future studies should aim to control for factors like the types of American universities and their regions to increase the representativeness of the corpora. Additionally, other research methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and eye-tracking experiments could be utilized to provide more in-depth insights into students' decision-making processes when using *make* and its collocations.

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