Use of signalling nouns in a learner corpus*

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Signalling nouns are nouns which have cohesive properties across and within clauses. A signalling noun is potentially any abstract noun the full meaning of which can only be made specific by reference to its context. Examples of nouns which can function as signalling nouns are attitude, assistance, difficulty, endurance, process, reason, result etc. Signalling nouns in discourse are closely associated with nominalisation and are problematic for learners. Based on a corpus of argumentative essays written by Cantonese L1 learners of English, this paper presents a taxonomy of error types and frequency data of the different error types in the use of signalling nouns. The paper then compares the average number of signalling nouns used per essay with grades awarded to the essays, on the one hand, and the numbers of signalling noun errors according to grades, on the other. In both cases there is a significant correlation. The findings confirm the intuitive idea that the use of signalling nouns adds to the overall coherence of a text.

Keywords: signalling noun, cohesion, lexical cohesion, coherence, learner corpus, learner error, error analysis

1. Introduction

The use of lexical cohesion, and within that, the use of what are referred to in this paper as signalling nouns (Flowerdew 2002, 2003a, 2003b), is a major challenge for writers, whether it be in their first or additional language(s). In the teaching of English as a second language, lexical cohesion has been neglected (for exceptions see Francis 1988; Thurstun & Candlin 1998), perhaps because there have been no good descriptions of the forms and functions of this phenomenon.

In their seminal book, Cohesion in English, Halliday and Hasan (1976) devote only a very short penultimate chapter to lexical cohesion, assigning the first part to what they refer to as general nouns, a superordinate term, which
can be viewed as incorporating signalling nouns. Since the publication of *Cohesion in English* a range of studies has focussed on various aspects of signalling nouns (Winter 1977, 1992; Tadros 1985; Francis 1986; Ivanić 1991), but this research has only relatively recently been brought together in a systematic fashion (Schmid 2000; Flowerdew 2002, 2003a, 2003b).

Now that we have these more comprehensive accounts, as provided by Schmid and Flowerdew, ways can be developed for diagnosing learner problems in the use of signalling nouns. In the tradition of error analysis in general (Odlin 1989; Richards 1992) and learner corpora studies in particular (Granger 1998), this diagnosis can be applied to teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is thus to analyze a corpus of learner writing, to develop a taxonomy of errors in the use of signalling nouns, and to provide some frequency data on the amount of use by learners of signalling nouns and the number of errors made in their use. The reason for the focus on signalling nouns is that they are particularly frequent in academic language, the register that has been most studied in learner corpus studies to date. In a study of a large corpus of academic English, consisting of research articles, textbook chapters and lectures, Flowerdew (in preparation) found that there was a significant difference in the frequency of use of signalling nouns across these different genres, with research articles making the most use of signalling nouns, followed by textbooks and then lectures. A comparison with spoken conversational data showed a much lower usage than in these academic genres. The appropriate use of signalling nouns can thus be seen as an important dimension in the development of academic literacy.

2. Corpus-based error analysis

Richards, Platt and Platt (1992:127–8) describe error analysis as developing in the 1960s with the goal of demonstrating that many learner errors were not due to the learners’ mother tongue, but to universals of second language acquisition. They also state that by the 1970s error analysis had largely been superseded by studies of interlanguage and second language acquisition. As Altenberg and Granger (2002:14) point out, error analysis has often been viewed negatively, “as retrograde, a return to the old days when errors were considered to be an entirely negative aspect of learner language”. However, as they argue (Altenberg & Granger 2002:14), “it [error analysis] is a key aspect of the process which takes us towards understanding interlanguage development and one which must be considered essential within a pedagogical framework.” In knowing what learners can be expected to have acquired at a certain stage
in their learning, teachers and materials designers are put in a position where they can optimise their input. Analysing learner errors is a useful way of finding out the stage of learning learners have arrived at.

As Altenberg and Granger (2002:14) also point out, error analysis with the use of computers is quite different from its earlier manifestation, where the focus was on decontextualized examples. With the use of corpora and corpus tools, analysts are able to consider both the context of use and the cotext of individual errors. At the same time, it might be added, with the use of tagging, analysts are able to retrieve large numbers of errors of the same type, thus determining the prevalence of a particular error within a given group of learners. In addition, where learner corpora are compared with corresponding native speaker corpora by contrasting the number of uses of a given item, consideration can be given to the question as to whether learners are avoiding an item, a sensible strategy if learners are not confident in the use of the item, but one which needs to be attended to, if learners are to make their language more native-like. In addition, in some cases, because of pedagogical practice, students may overuse a given item; this again needs to be taken into consideration.

3. Error analysis and lexis

Another difference between old-style error analysis and computer-based approaches is in the focus of analysis. In the 1960s and 1970s linguistics and language teaching were under the influence of structuralism. This meant a focus on syntax and phonology, at the expense of lexis. While this situation was most predominant in the United States, in Great Britain, led by linguists such as Firth, Halliday and Sinclair, at the same time, a much different approach was adopted in linguistics (if not language teaching), with lexis viewed as an important linguistic level in its own right, although at the same time interdependent with grammar (Halliday’s “lexico-grammatical” level [Halliday 2004]). Lexis, according to this view, could be analysed syntagmatically, as well as paradigmatically. “You shall know a word by the company it keeps”, in the words of Firth (1957:179). This emphasis on the syntagmatic dimension of lexis, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, was discussed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) in *Cohesion in English*, where the idea of collocation, or how words tend to co-occur, was developed. Collocation is concerned with purely lexical relations (Stubbs 2001:65). However, there are also relations between lexical and grammatical words, referred to as colligation (e.g. Stubbs 2001:64).
In this paper, in accordance with this syntagmatic view of lexis, the analysis of signalling noun errors will emphasise how they are misused on both the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic axes — how an inappropriate word (paradigmatic axis) or inappropriate collocation/colligation (syntagmatic axis) may be chosen.

4. Signalling nouns

A signalling noun is potentially any abstract noun which is unspecific out of context, but specific in context (Flowerdew 2002, 2003a, 2003b). To put it another way, the full meaning of the word is not made clear unless it is put in a specific context. Specifics may be realized in the clause, as in examples 1 and 2, where the full meaning of the abstract (signalling) nouns “threat” (example 1) and “question” (example 2) are realised in the underlined portion of text (all examples are drawn from the academic corpus used in Flowerdew [in preparation]).

(1) While it provides opportunities for interested consumers to participate in research studies, the threat that professional participants will skew results raises ethical issues for researchers who want impartial, naive study participants.

(2) And really addressing the question of whether, for all sorts of evidential and process reasons, we should be greeting silence as proof, and whether we should be putting accused persons under pressure to speak either in interview or in court.

Specifìcs may also be realised across clauses, as in examples 3 and 4. In example 3 “findings” is realised in the preceding underlined clauses, while in example 4 “risk” is realised in the clauses which follow. In their inter-clausal function signalling nouns may thus be realised either anaphorically (example 3) or cataphorically (example 4).

(3) However, recent laboratory experiments have demonstrated that they are not only strongly dependent on the carbonate chemistry of the culture medium but that the so-called ‘vital-effects’ are probably mediated via perturbations of the local carbonate system. These findings have an important impact on the interpretation of isotope data.
Despite their benefits to medicine, vaccines are not without risk. If the vaccine maker does not completely inactivate a pathogen, the recipient can actually develop polio or another serious disease.

Signalling nouns may also rely on background knowledge in order to be made “specific”. In example 5, the variable meaning of “impact” is not supplied, an analysis of its cotext reveals. Readers have to use their background knowledge to provide a suitable possible interpretation of what the (favorable) “impact” might be.

The ensuing sharp increases in grain prices in 1988 had a favorable impact on farmers.

5. The corpus

The corpus used in this study consists of 110,000 words, drawn from a larger corpus of 390,587 words, made up of argumentative essays written by Cantonese L1 first year students at a university in Hong Kong. The essays were written under examination conditions and the students did not have access to dictionaries. Students were given one hour 45 minutes to complete the task. They were given a word limit of 450–500 words. There were altogether 210 essays in the smaller corpus, on nine topics, as follows: Recycling, Smoking Ban, Credit Cards, Hong Kong Country Parks, Immigrants from China, Lowu Railway, Peer Assessment and Cyber Cafes. Students were given one of these topics and provided with six sources, each consisting of six short paragraphs. The sources took the form of extracts from books, journals and the internet. Students were told they were only allowed to use one direct quotation, but, where quotations were used, they were deleted before the scripts were put into the corpus. The essays from the larger corpus to be included in the smaller one were selected to include equal numbers of those receiving B+, B, C+, C, D+, and D grades. Essays receiving A and F grades were not included, as there were not sufficient numbers of these grades to balance those awarded the middle range grades.

The larger corpus was created with a view to being incorporated into the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) created by Sylviane Granger of the University of Louvain (Belgium). Although a version of the corpus has now been included in ICLE, at the time of the study this was not the case. Access to the data was kindly provided by Linda Lin, who created the corpus.
6. Methodology

The methodology for identifying and classifying signalling noun errors in the corpus was as follows. A trained research assistant, Delian Gaskell, who had previously worked on a funded research project on signalling nouns in academic discourse, systematically sampled the larger corpus referred to above (i.e. essays were taken equally for each letter grade), identifying signalling noun errors until a theoretical saturation point (Glaser & Strauss 1967) was reached, that is to say a stage was arrived at where no new categories were being discovered (124,000 words). As errors were found in the corpus, they were copied from the text and pasted into a separate file for later analysis. Together with the author, hypotheses were developed as to possible distinctive types of error as new examples were pulled from the corpus. Once broad categories of error types became apparent, the research assistant continued to search through the corpus until a sizeable number of examples of each error type was found. As this process took place, where examples did not fit into the hypothesised categories, then new categories were created, sometimes replacing existing categories, if they had not been expanded greatly. The process was thus an iterative one, with the number of categories being expanded and collapsed until the collected errors could be accounted for in the most parsimonious way. The resulting taxonomy of errors was thus a joint production on the part of the research assistant and the author.

7. Findings

Figures 1 and 2 show how the errors identified in the corpus were classified. As these figures show, errors were classified into the following categories: colligation, collocation, incorrect signalling noun, and missing signalling noun. This section will describe and exemplify each category with corpus examples. The types are discussed in order of frequency. However, more detailed frequency data will be presented in the next section.

7.1 Colligation errors with signalling nouns

The most frequent category of error is colligation (see Section 3 for definition). Learner errors in this category were primarily with following prepositions. Signalling nouns can be followed by many different prepositions and there does not seem to be any apparent systematicity in their use (although this would be
an area worthy of study). This would account for the difficulty learners have here. In his book, Schmid (2000) provides a wealth of examples of signalling nouns and many examples of the different prepositions which typically follow certain nouns. Example 6 provides a group of such problematic colligations (signalling noun in bold, problematic preposition underlined, appropriate alternative in brackets at the end of each phrase). The appropriacy of each collocation was checked against the British National Corpus, using the Phrases in English software (http://pie.usna.edu/ accessed 7 December 2005); also for collocation, see Section 7.6:
(6) a. the major argument in supporting the development of country parks (for)
b. the chance to suffer lung cancer, heart diseases and respiratory diseases (of [suffering])
c. discrimination to smokers (against)
d. a great effort on banning smoking in restaurants (to [ban])
e. the argument on developing country parks (for)

7.2 Incorrect signalling nouns

The second category is that of incorrect signalling noun. Errors here can be grouped according to meaning and form (see Figure 2).

7.2.1 Error in meaning i.e. wrong lexical noun

Examples 7 and 8 are examples of this category. In example 7 the realisation (underlined portion) refers to the effect of low wages on spending power. Clearly this cannot be labelled as “pollution”, as the writer has done. A more appropriate signalling noun might be something like “situation”, perhaps pre-modified with a negative epithet (the student’s use of “pollution” would suggest that a negative connotation is perhaps being attempted). In example 8 “way” might perhaps be better replaced by a signalling noun such as “procedure”. On the other hand a post-modifier might make the use of “way” more acceptable, e.g. “stable way of dealing with the matter”

(7) It may further worsen our economic pollution also after the economic downturn. If their wages are low, they must not prefer to spend more in daily life

(8) The main purpose of establish this scheme that the government hopes all of groups will be able to support themselves. It seems to provide the stable way to them.

Although the signalling nouns in these examples are clearly inappropriate, they do show that the learners have grasped the concept of using signalling nouns to encapsulate a concept which is elucidated in the following (example 7) or preceding (example 8) context. Errors such as these might be considered developmental in terms of second language acquisition. The learners understand the functioning of signalling nouns; their problem is that they lack knowledge of the specific abstract noun in the given context (i.e. their problem is on the paradigmatic, rather than the syntagmatic dimension).
7.2.2 Errors of signalling noun form

Signalling noun errors concerning the form of the noun fall into three categories: noun form confusion; adjective vs. noun confusion; and gerund vs. noun confusion.

7.2.2.1 Noun form confusion. Examples 9 and 10 show noun form confusion.

(9) Nevertheless, modern recycling is a capital-intensive and relatively high-tech industry. The process of recycling demands large amount of capital. This expenditure may be greater than the cost of products which produce by virgin raw materials.

(10) People against this points out that this would hurt unemployment and the prospection of local university graduates. Mainland supports large in numbers of these workers relatively to Hong Kong. So local intellectuals prospects may be affect because companies would employ Mainland specialists rather than local workers.

In example 9 “expenditure” seems to be an attempt at the signalling noun “expenditure”, while in example 10 “prospection” is close to “prospects”, which would be appropriate. It might be argued that problems such as these are not really problems with the cohesive function of signalling nouns, but are more appropriately considered as problems of spelling or word formation. On the other hand, it can also be argued that such errors should be considered as signalling noun errors, due to the fact that a large number of signalling nouns are deverbal nouns and they follow the affixation rules associated with nominalization. This can be seen in Table 1, where out of the top 100 nouns from a corpus of academic English (Flowerdew in preparation referred to above), the following affixes can be noted (some of them more than once): -ation, -ure, -ition, -ity, -sion, -ship, -ism, -ance, -ence, -age, -istic and -ulty. It is ironic that the learners who produced examples 9 and 10, while understanding that signalling nouns often take affixes, have chosen the wrong ones. On the positive side, this can be considered as a stage in the learners’ interlanguage, where they at least have a partial understanding of signalling nouns and how they work.

7.2.2.2 Adjective-noun confusion. Examples 11 and 12 indicate adjective-noun confusion.

(11) Students can purchase their reference books and materials by credit card through internet system in local and overseas. They just need to la in their account number and the expiry date. After all the transactions are
completed. The goods will be received in a few days. It allows students more compatible with the advance technology of the society.

(12) For example, travel can gain any type of information through internet, at the cafes in most major airports due to their requirements or interesting. <Reference> states that the travelers and tourist can check information of most major airports and any kinds of information which they interest through internet inside cyber cafes. For example, the travelers who want to get some guides for their travel.

In example 11 the writer could have used a noun “compatibility” instead of the adjective “compatible”. In example 12, interestingly, the writer refers to “requirements or interesting”, thus selecting a noun (“requirements”) appropriately, but making an error with the selection of an adjective (“interesting”), where the noun “interests” was needed.

These errors seem to be due to a lack of knowledge of the nominal form of an adjective which is already known. The use of the adjective rather than the noun at least performs the function of conveying the semantics, if not the
morphology, of the message the learners want to convey. Again, this could be claimed to be a problem of general lack of knowledge of word formation. Given that adjective/noun confusion is a general problem, then it should not be treated as a specific signalling noun problem, but perhaps tackled with frequent signalling nouns. On the other hand, as noted earlier, in academic writing, these signalling nouns are very frequent and therefore deserve a separate treatment and adjective/noun confusion could be part of that treatment.

7.2.2.3 Gerund-noun confusion. In examples 13 and 14 writers have used gerunds inappropriately.

(13) According to <R>, breathing secondhand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease by about 25%, the reason behind this increasing is that there is no smoke-banning in public places, especially restaurants.

(14) The decreasing of economy in Hong Kong is seriously. Many people lose their job or earn a lower salary than before.

In example 13 “increasing” is used where “increase” is required. Similarly, in example 14 “decreasing” is used instead of “decrease”. These errors are understandable, given that many signalling nouns do take the -ing suffix (e.g. “easing”, “spending”, “writing”). We seem to have here a case of over-generalization; learners are relying on a limited repertoire of nominal suffixes, specifically the suffix associated with the gerund.

7.3 Omission of signalling noun

Turning now to the next category of error (Figure 1), a minor one, examples 15 and 16 show the omission of signalling nouns.

(15) Actually, most of the disposal in Hong Kong is plastic, if policy of recycling is adopted, serious pollution problem can be reduced. Also, recycling can conserve energy in managing waste disposal. In addition to these, the method of recycling can also reduce management cost in waste and thus increase competitiveness of manufacturers.

(16) Although, playing games is a way to gain relaxation, it may also contains some adverse effects on young people’s physically and mentally. As time goes by, it may harm their eyesight, moreover, majority of the online games contain real-life violence which may mislead the youth to use violence, to solve problems.
In example 15, although we have an anaphoric pronoun, “these”, a signalling noun such as “measures” would make the meaning clearer. It seems that the writer either does not know that a signalling noun is needed here or, if they do, do not know one which would be appropriate. In example 16 we have two adverbs, “physically” and “mentally”, where more appropriate would be adjectives followed by a signalling noun such as “well-being” or “health” (i.e. “physical and mental well-being/health”. (Alternatively, this could be corrected by deleting the possessive in “people’s” to give “some adverse effects on young people physically and mentally”).

7.6 Collocation errors with signalling nouns

The third major category of error associated with inter-clausal uses of signalling nouns is to do with collocation (Figure 1). Such errors may concern either verbs or pre-modification. Looking first at verbs, examples 17 and 18 are instances of these.

(17) According to the Hong Kong SAR’s new policy, smoking will be banned in restaurant. After this law has been opened to the public, there have been a lot of argument on this law.

(18) <Reference> mentioned that the burning of plastic waste generates toxic by-products and plastic waste is nonbiodegradable, cannot decompose by micro — organism, when landfilled it is truly that plastic is made of some toxic element such as chloride. It will release lots of toxic gases during the process of burning. Also, after landfilling, the plastic waste still take up are third of landfill space. In conclusion, recycling seems to be the only method of waste management in Hong Kong as it can store the problems arising from the transitional method and reduce pollution.

In example 17 the signalling noun “law” is collocated with the verb “opened”, where something like “introduced” would have been more appropriate. In example 18 the verb “store” is collocated with the signalling noun “problems”, where a verb such as “resolve” or “overcome” would have been more suitable.

Finally, looking now at pre-modification we have instances of this type of error in examples 19 and 20.

(19) On the other hand, however, a number of experts have presented that using credit card would case a great deal of burden on students. Lau pointed out that the main problem caused by permitting students to hold credit cards is that they may get into debt.
Some people, however, think that it would draw a serious impact to the business, causing billions of dollars’ loss and unemployment.

In both of these examples the signalling nouns seem to be constricted in the collocates they may accept. Thus in example 19, where we have “a great deal of burden”, the prefabricated pattern “great burden” is acceptable, but not what the writer had produced. Similarly in example 20 the prefabricated pattern would be with “have” or “result in” or “create”, but the writer has used “draw”.

7.7 Frequency data

Figure 3 provides frequency data for the different types of error. Figure 3 shows that the most common problem was with incorrect signalling nouns, followed by incorrect use of signalling noun, errors in collocation and no signalling noun. Out of an overall total of 1451 errors, there were 989 colligation errors, 283 incorrect signalling noun uses, 153 errors of collocation and just 26 examples of no signalling noun when there should have been one.

Figure 4 shows that the highest grade students, B+, use on average 3.95 signalling nouns per hundred words, while the lowest grade, D, use only 3.05, clearly indicating that there is a general decrease in the use of signalling nouns by learners of lower grades, despite a slight upward number between C+ and C students (of course, we need to bear in mind here to what extent the grades awarded were reliable). An ANOVA test carried out on these figures shows that
the difference in signalling noun use among the different grades of essays was statistically significant (p<0.05).

Figure 5 shows that lower grade students make a higher number of errors when they use signalling nouns. When B+ students use signalling nouns, only 27% have errors associated with them, while the lowest grade of student in the study, D, have 44% with associated errors, a difference of 17%. An ANOVA test confirmed that these differences in number of uses and number of errors were significant (p<0.05). Pearson’s Correlation Test was also used to find out the correlation between the grade of essays and percentage of errors made. This test revealed a positive, although weak-to-moderate, correlation between the grades of essays and the percentage of errors made (p<.05, r = -.232), suggesting a confirmation of the trend that the lower the grade, the more errors are made.
8. Discussion

Based on the learner corpus of Hong Kong writers, this study has identified a range of errors in the use of signalling nouns. Specifically, problems it has identified are: 1. colligation errors; 2. incorrect signalling noun choice; 3. missing signalling noun and 4. collocation errors with signalling noun. Within the colligation category, problems are mainly to do with following prepositions. In the incorrect category, problems arise from incorrect choice of noun and incorrect word form, the latter category including noun form confusion, adjective vs. noun confusion and gerund vs. noun confusion. Within the collocation category, problems are to do with collocation with verbs and pre-modification. Some of these problems are likely to be related to transfer from Cantonese, notably adjective/noun confusion, gerund vs. noun form confusion, and collocation, although without a comparison with a corpus of learner data from other first language groups it is difficult to make strong claims here. Other problems may be to do with overgeneralisation, notably incorrect word form and gerund vs. noun confusion.

In the earlier part of this paper it was anticipated that signalling noun errors could possibly occur on either the paradigmatic axis (how an inappropriately chosen word may be chosen) or the syntagmatic axis (how the word is related to other words). As it turns out, both types of error have been identified, although the syntagmatic axis (at least in terms of frequency) seems to be more problematic. Inappropriate signalling nouns function on the paradigmatic dimension (e.g. examples 7 and 8) while colligation and collocation problems operate on the syntagmatic dimension (e.g. examples 6 and 17–20). Missing signalling nouns, on the other hand, could be functioning on either level (e.g. examples 15–16); the learner might not be aware of the appropriate noun to choose and so leaves it out (paradigmatic) or they might not realise that a noun is needed (syntagmatic).

9. Limitations of the Study

Before discussing possible implications of the study, some limitations and ways in which the research will be taken forward will be pointed out. First, no comparison with native English-speaker data are provided. This would identify if students are under- or over-using signalling nouns (intuition would suggest under-use) and to what extent their range of use (i.e. different types) might vary with that of native speakers (again intuition would suggest a narrower
range on the part of the learners). This limitation will be rectified in a follow-up study which will compare the learner corpus used in this study with a native speaker corpus (such a corpus — the LOCNESS corpus — is available with the ICLE set of learner corpora). In addition, contrasts will be made with comparable learner corpora from other languages, with a view to seeing to what extent the problems identified with the Hong Kong Chinese learners are “universal” and to what extent they are due to the specific typology of the L1 of the Chinese writers. However, as Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:66) warn, one needs to be very careful in assigning the cause of a given error, not least because many errors are likely to be due to multiple rather than single sources.

10. Implications of the study

In spite of the above limitations, the results of this study are not without value from the pedagogic point of view. They also have something to tell us about the importance of signalling nouns as a part of lexical cohesion in general. Taking the pedagogic aspect first, as the focus of this paper is primarily on pedagogy, to paraphrase Corder (1967, cited in Barlow 2005:51), as with error analysis in general, the results of this study are significant in three ways: 1. they serve a pedagogic purpose by showing learners what they have not yet mastered; 2. they serve a research purpose by providing evidence about how languages are learned; and 3. they serve a learning purpose by acting as devices by which learners can discover the rules of the target language (i.e. by obtaining feedback on their errors). The taxonomy and examples and the syntagmatic/paradigmatic distinction are clearly useful in categorising errors with signalling nouns. The classification of signalling noun errors in this way can provide a check-list which can be used for error diagnosis and correction and for the design of teaching materials to improve the use of signalling nouns by Chinese learners, if not groups from other language backgrounds as well. The frequency data demonstrate that effective use of signalling nouns is a developmental phenomenon which correlates with overall writing ability. Related to this issue, consideration should be given to the question as to what degree the “errors” identified in this paper represent different degrees in terms of developing interlanguage. In example 9, where the learner writes *expenstion*, they have clearly understood quite a lot about the functioning of signalling nouns. They have realised that a signalling noun is appropriate where they have placed it; they have identified the right lexeme; they have realised that signalling nouns often end with a nominal suffix; the only problem remaining is in the wrong choice of suffix
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(-tion instead of -iture). A similar degree of competence can be noted in example 10, where the writer has used prospection instead of “prospects”, the only problem again being in the choice of suffix. These errors show that a high degree of acquisition would seem to have taken place and that these errors might be viewed in a different light to those, for example, where the wrong signalling nouns have been selected or, indeed, where a signalling noun might be seen to be missing, as in some of the other examples presented in this paper.

Finally, turning now to the importance of signalling nouns as an aspect of lexical cohesion in general, the data presented in this study have shown that those learners who achieved higher marks tended to use more signalling nouns and with greater accuracy. This confirms the intuitive idea that signalling nouns are an essential dimension of lexical cohesion, which contributes to the coherence of a text.

Notes

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