

## **Analysis of Light Verb Construction Use in L1 and L2: Insights from British and Malaysian Student Writing**

**August 2021 – Volume 25, Number 2**

**Christina Sook Beng Ong**

Universiti Sains Malaysia

<christinaongsookbeng@student.usm.my>

**Hajar Abdul Rahim**

Universiti Sains Malaysia

<hajar@usm.my>

### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the use of DO, HAVE, MAKE, GIVE and TAKE in light verb constructions (LVCs) and their corresponding simplex verb forms in British L1 and Malaysian L2 students' writing. The students' essay sub-corpus of the International Corpus of English (ICE) of Great Britain (ICE-GB) and Malaysia (ICE-Malaysia) formed the data of this study. The analysis revealed that most LVCs in the L1 and L2 student writings are basic in structure, comprising indefinite article, no modifier, and in the active voice. The analysis also showed that although LVCs are common in the students' writing, the corresponding simplex verb form of the verbs are higher in frequency. The only notable difference between the two groups is the overuse of zero article LVCs in the L2 students' writing, which is possibly due to their L1 influence.*

**Keywords:** *light verbs, delexical verb, LVC, simplex verb, L1 vs. L2 student writing*

The sentences *She is taking a drive after work* and *She is driving after work* may be uttered to state the same proposition. However, the verb TAKE in the first sentence does not contribute to any meaning of its construction. Known as light verb or delexical verb, it is similar to other common action verbs, but regarded as semantically reduced or possessing bleached or weakened meaning (Hoffmann, Hundt, & Mukherjee, 2011; Kearns, 2002; Leech et al., 2009; Wierzbicka, 1982). This is because noun complements that follow light verbs carry the main semantic content (Kearns, 2002; Mehl, 2017 Sinclair & Fox, 1990) as in the case of *drive* in the light verb construction (LVC henceforth), TAKING a drive. As the noun *drive* expresses the main meaning of the construction, it also takes the role of the corresponding simplex verb. Simplex verbs, according to Hoffmann, et al. (2011), derive from the noun complement in

LVCs. Thus, *She is taking a drive after work* can be written as *She is driving after work* because the noun complement (drive) is accounted for by the semantic content of the predicate (is TAKING a drive after work) since the light verb, TAKE is incapable of doing so.

Despite their prevalence, LVCs have not received as much attention as collocations, lexical bundles, and other phrasal forms in student writing. Available research in LVCs in student writing mostly focused on the misuse of light verbs. Chi, Wong, and Wong's (1994) study for instance identified a list of wrongly paired delexical verbs and noun phrases in a Hong Kong learner corpus. In their study on Jordanian and Thai university students' writing, respectively, Eisouh (2012) and Sanguannam's (2017) examination of delexicalised constructions revealed that proficient student performed slightly better in selecting suitable light verbs to precede certain noun phrases. Their studies, however, found that majority of the students faced considerable difficulty in producing native-like LVCs (Eisouh, 2012; Sanguannam, 2017). Laporte (2012) also found high occurrences of deviated delexical verb forms in her research in EFL contexts (based on the International Corpus of Learner English from France, Netherlands, Japan, Russia) and ESL contexts (based on the International Corpus of English from Kenya, India, Jamaica, and Singapore). Studies such as Altenberg and Granger (2001), Juknevičienė (2008), and Laporte (2012) found that even advanced learners of English face difficulty in using high frequency verbs which include light verbs. Marco (2011), who compared the British Academic Written English Corpus and the British National Corpus, also discovered many wrongly constructed LVCs especially those headed by MAKE and DO in the former. These studies suggest that erroneous LVC forms are found in both native and non-native students' writing.

The interest in the erroneous use of LVCs is due mainly to problems faced by non-native English students. According to Altenberg and Granger (2001), light verbs and other high frequency verbs are considered a major stumbling block for non-native learners because of their superficial knowledge of the verbs. To date, however, there is little understanding about LVCs in student writing in L1 and L2 contexts, in terms of structure and preference for LVCs or its simplex verb forms. There is also a gap in the literature with regard to how L1 and L2 students differ in their use of LVCs. In the Malaysian context, studies on grammatical items such as verb forms, verb collocations, tense use, and phrasal verbs (e.g., A'hour & Mukundan, 2012; Ang, Hajar, Tan, & Khazriyati, 2011; Krishnasamy, 2015; Zarifi & Mukundan, 2014) are not uncommon. Yet, there has been no research on LVC, a lexico-grammatical item. The current study, therefore, undertakes to investigate the use of LVCs by L1 and L2 students, represented by British and Malaysian students, respectively.

Given the above, the main objective of the current study is to analyse the structural patterns of LVCs, the frequency of LVCs compared to simplex verb forms, and the use of LVCs and simplex forms in British and Malaysian students' writing. The study addresses the following questions:

1. How do the structural patterns of LVCs in Malaysian and British students' writing differ?
2. What are the frequencies of LVCs vs. simplex verb forms in Malaysian and British students' writing?
3. How does the use of LVCs and simplex verb forms differ in Malaysian and British students' writing?

The answers to the questions will provide new understanding on LVCs and their use in student writing which have implications for ELT material design, content and approach, not just for L2 contexts, but also for L1 contexts.

### **Structural Patterns of an LVC**

Past studies highlight four features in LVCs: the form of noun complement, type of articles, modifiers preceding the noun complement, and grammatical voice. Firstly, the noun complements in LVCs can either be isomorphic (Dixon, 2005; Wierzbicka 1982) or non-isomorphic (Mehl, 2017; Ronan & Schneider, 2015) which means both plain verb base form (e.g., MAKE a **demand** and TAKE a **stroll**) and derived form (e.g., GIVE **suggestion** and TAKE **action**) are accepted, provided the verbs are nominalised (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Secondly, most researchers, including Brugman (2001), Dixon (2005), Hoffmann et al. (2011), and Mehl (2017), agree that LVCs may be preceded by all three types of articles. Thirdly, modification of the noun complement is accepted, given that the adjectives can be turned into adverbs in their simplex verb form counterparts (Dixon, 2005; Hoffmann et al., 2011; Shahrokny-Prehn & Hoche, 2011). Researchers (e.g., Leech et al. 2009; Mehl, 2017; Ronan & Schneider, 2015) accept multiple modifications with no corresponding adverbial clause because it is one of the ways to describe the event in detail (Gradecak-Erdeljic, 2009). Fourthly, Dixon (2005), Hoffmann, et al. (2011), and Kearns (2002) only accept LVCs in active voice because isomorphic form of noun complements appears erroneous in passive voice. On the other hand, Mehl (2017) and Ronan and Schneider (2015) accept LVCs in both active and passive voice because they take into account noun complements in isomorphic and non-isomorphic forms where the latter are usually used in passive voice. Table 1 presents an overview of the structural patterns of LVCs and their corresponding simplex verb forms (bold and italicised).

The first structural pattern under each category in Table 1, isomorphic noun, indefinite article, no modification, and active voice are the basic constituents of LVCs which form the prototypical LVC structure. The current study considers LVCs with structural patterns presented in the middle column of Table 1 which considers all possible articles, modifiers, and grammatical voices because non-prototypical LVC structures are abundant and recognised in recent research (Bonial & Pollard, 2020; Mehl, 2017; Ronan & Schneider, 2015). Thus, in our study, LVCs with or without corresponding simplex forms that emerge in the data are categorised according to the four structural patterns.

**Table 1. Structural Patterns of LVCs and their Simplex Verb Forms.**

Structural Patterns	LVCs	Simplex Verb Forms
<b>(i) Form of noun complement</b>		
isomorphic noun	My grandparents are TAKING a <b>stroll</b> at the park.	My grandparents are <i>strolling</i> at the park.
non-isomorphic noun	The CEO plans to MAKE an <b>announcement</b> about his retirement in the next board meeting.	The CEO plans to <i>announce</i> his retirement in the next board meeting.
<b>(ii) Type of articles preceding noun complement</b>		
indefinite article	Jack decided to not MAKE <b>an</b> order again from Ace Computer Store.	Jack decided to not <i>order</i> again from Ace Computer Store.
definite article	They are DOING <b>the</b> dance now in the school hall.	They are <i>dancing</i> now in the school hall.
zero article	She thanked all those who GAVE <b>Ø</b> help to her.	She thanked all those who <i>helped</i> her.
<b>(iii) Modification of noun complement</b>		
no modification	She is GIVING him a call.	She is <i>calling</i> him.
modified by adjective, adverb or both	They are DOING a <b>thorough</b> research on their newly collected samples.	They are <i>thoroughly researching</i> their newly collected samples.
multiple modification	He is TAKING a <b>cold expensive alcoholic</b> drink.	–
<b>(iv) Grammatical voice</b>		
active voice	X GIVES <b>support</b> to all students.	X <i>supports</i> all students.
passive voice	<b>Support</b> is GIVEN to all students.	

## Malaysian Students' Writing

Past research in Malaysian student writing mostly focused on error analysis, particularly grammatical errors. While some researchers have not explicitly conducted error analysis, pedagogical implications are suggested at the end of their studies in the hope that similar errors can be reduced. Various methods have been adopted to research errors in the use of English language in the Malaysian context, but the literature shows that the conventional method of error analysis and descriptive corpus-based method are preferred.

Lim's (1976) study, which highlighted and exemplified three types of errors (namely interlanguage errors, intralingual and developmental errors and over-generalisation) in students' writings, was one of the earliest studies in the Malaysian context. Since then, several studies on errors in Malaysian students' writings based on Corder's 3 step-method (identify, classify, and explain) have been carried out. One study found Malay language interference as a cause of

erroneous structures in Malaysian secondary school student writing (Khazriyati et al., 2006) while another, which investigated students' use of English articles (Marlyna et al., 2007), found that the students faced more difficulty in using correct articles than other English grammar features. Subject-verb agreement has also been shown to be one of the most common errors in Malaysian secondary school student writing (Saadiyah & Khor, 2009; Saadiyah & Subramaniam, 2009). A study on trainee teachers (Siti Hamin & Mohd Mustafa, 2010) reported that the respondents avoided the use of complex SVA sub-rules, while a study on TESL undergraduate writing showed that grammatical errors were mainly related to misinformation of verb and noun phrases (Ahour & Mukundan, 2012). These findings are supported by more recent research such as Krishnasamy's (2015) study on diploma student narrative writing which revealed errors in tense, SVA and verb. Other studies, such as Charanjit, Amreet, Nur Qistina and Ravinthar's (2017) study and Gedion, Tati and Peter's (2016) study found that verb forms in student writing are the most common type of error, and that they faced problems in constructing complex sentences and in using the right tenses, respectively. In short, Malaysian students, from secondary to pre-university and advanced learners commit various forms of grammatical errors in English particularly verb forms.

Corpus-based studies on errors and unnaturalness in Malaysian student writing in English have also increased in number. The English of Malaysian School Students Corpus (EMAS), the Corpus Archive of Learner English in Sabah and Sarawak (CALES), and the Malaysian Corpus of Learner English (MACLE) especially have facilitated studies on a myriad of grammatical problems. Botley and Dillah (2007) study based on CALES found several errors including spelling errors due to mother tongue interference (Malay language in this case) and lexical borrowing, although these were less frequent. In another study, Botley (2010) compared CALES with LOCNESS to foreground interlanguage evidence in frequently used idiomatic expressions by East Malaysian university students. The study discovered that most of the common expressions in CALES are heavily influenced by the students' mother tongues. The findings of the study also show that numerous idioms functioning as discourse markers are overused in CALES. Other studies (e.g., Ang, et al., 2011; Zarifi & Mukundan, 2014) detected non-colloquial use of collocations and phrasal verbs in EMAS. In addition to multi-word unit related errors, Roslina and Zuraidah (2013) looked into the pattern of be-omission in MACLE. A more recent study using MACLE (Zuraidah & Srinivass, 2017) analysed the use of cohesive devices, specifically on how Malaysian university students semantically connect two different meanings in one clause.

The studies reviewed above focused on erroneous structures produced by Malaysian students per se. So, the present study is interested in comparing the use of LVCs in Malaysian student writing with British student writing. To this end, two comparable corpora of Malaysian student writing and native student writing, in this case British, would provide the data needed for the analysis (Adel, 2006). A method that is still widely adopted in studies on student writing, the comparison of the occurrences of structural LVC patterns in British students' essays and in Malaysian students' essays, will provide new insights into the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 students' use of LVCs and their simplex verb forms.

## **Method**

To investigate LVCs in Malaysian L2 and British L1 student writing, the ICE-Malaysia and ICE-Great Britain (ICE-GB henceforth) student writing sub-corpora were used to generate the data for analysis. The International Corpus of English (ICE) project involves the development

of a one-million-word corpus consisting of spoken and written texts from a range of sociolinguistics variables to represent a variety of English. ICE aims to allow researchers to compare the use of English in countries where the language is used either as the first or second language (Nelson, 1996). It is therefore based on a standardised corpus design where there are 500 texts divided among 12 sub-categories (i.e., four sub-categories under spoken and eight sub-categories under written) with approximately 2,000 words each (“International Corpus of English,” 2016). Since Malaysian student writing of English is the focus of this study, the non-printed: non-professional writing sub-corpus of ICE-Malaysia consisting of 15 student essays was used. These writings were produced by Malaysian undergraduates pursuing their degrees in two local universities. The sub-corpus is relatively small with only 31,854 tokens. The same component from ICE-GB, acting as the reference corpus of native student data also formed the corpus for this study. Comparing an L2 represented by ICE-Malaysian sub-corpus with an L1 represented by ICE-GB is useful in informing extensive range of pedagogical applications that could benefit L2 students (Granger, 2015).

The data for the study was generated using the *AntConc* software (Anthony, 2018). The data generated included wordlists of the frequencies of DO, HAVE, MAKE, GIVE and TAKE alongside their lemmas in sub-corpus of ICE-Malaysia. These are commonly used light verbs according to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002). Besides the wordlists, the concordance tool was used to generate concordance lines that were manually scrutinised to select LVCs needed for analysis. Concordance lines with LVCs that meet the criteria listed below were identified in the first phase of analysis:

1. form of noun complement: isomorphic and non-isomorphic nouns
2. type of articles preceding the noun complement: indefinite, definite, and zero articles
3. modification of noun complement: no modification, modified by adjective, adverb or both, and multiple modifiers
4. grammatical voice: active and passive voices

Given the above list of criteria, fixed and idiomatic expressions, non-LVC, sentences comprising derived forms of the five light verbs such as noun (e.g., *take-away*), adjective (e.g., *a given context*) and phrasal verb (e.g., *make up*) were not considered for the analysis. The same steps were repeated for ICE-GB sub-corpus of non-printed: non-professional writing category. Frequency counts of LVC headed by DO, HAVE, MAKE, GIVE and TAKE in sub-corpus of ICE-Malaysia were then compared to sub-corpus of ICE-GB.

In the second phase of the analysis, all noun complements of the LVCs were identified from the concordance lists generated. The noun complements in non-isomorphic forms were converted to base forms. Because the corpus size is relatively small, no cut-off point was imposed, which means even though a noun complement only occurs once, it was taken into consideration. Following the identification of noun complements, lexical search of the simplex verbs derived from the noun complements using *AntConc* was conducted. As with the previous phase, this process was done using the ICE-Malaysia and ICE-GB sub-corpora.

Within the same learner corpus, a comparison was made between LVCs and the simplex verb forms to find out whether the former or the latter is preferred. Because the noun complements

in sub-corpus of ICE-Malaysia may differ from those in sub-corpus of ICE-GB, comparison between LVCs and their simplex verb forms was made within each corpus.

## Findings

### Structural Patterns of LVCs in Malaysian and British Student Writing

The comparison of occurrences between DO, HAVE, MAKE, GIVE and TAKE LVCs in ICE-Malaysia and ICE-GB sub-corpora in terms of the four structural characteristics is as follows:

**Table 2. LVC Structural Characteristics in Malaysian and British Student Writing.**

	Malaysian	British
a) form of noun complement		
i. isomorphic noun	16	11
ii. non-isomorphic noun	17	16
b) articles preceding the noun complement		
i. indefinite article	10	5
ii. definite article	2	3
iii. zero article	9	5
c) modification of noun complement		
i. no modification	21	13
ii. modified by adjective	7	5
iii. multiple modification	0	5
iv. other determiner	5	4
d) grammatical voice		
i. active	33	27
ii. passive	0	0

Table 2 shows that Malaysian students for the prototypical structure of LVC is evident from the high occurrence of the basic LVC constituents, namely isomorphic noun, indefinite article, no modifier, and active voice. The four structural characteristics in ICE-Malaysia occur 30% more times than in ICE-GB. Unlike Altenberg and Granger (2001) and Laporte (2012) who found learners in their studies generally underuse delexical verb, particularly delexical MAKE, the current analysis shows that Malaysian students overuse them. The number of LVCs taking the basic constituents is high in ICE-Malaysia and ranges from 10 to 33 occurrences compared to ICE-GB which ranges from 5 to 27 occurrences.

As regards the noun complement, both Malaysian and British students slightly overuse the non-isomorphic form. Because non-isomorphic nouns consist of noun complements which are not in their base forms (i.e., nominalised nouns and inflected nouns), their frequencies are slightly

higher. In terms of article use in LVCs, the analysis shows that while Malaysian students prefer LVCs taking the indefinite article, they also overuse zero article LVCs. The preference for zero article LVCs is not without precedence; a sizeable number is also found in South Asian English newspaper (Hoffmann et al., 2011), ICE-Hong Kong and ICE-Singapore (Mehl, 2017). Most noun complements are not modified in both sub-corpora but Malaysian students tend to slightly overuse LVCs with at least one modifier and underuse LVCs with multiple modifiers. As mentioned earlier, the other determiner sub-category consists of LVCs accepting quantifiers as modifiers. It is apparent that LVCs in the active voice are dominant in both sub-corpora. In general, overuse of LVC with indefinite article, no modification and active voice among Malaysian students depict the adherence to prototypical LVC structure.

Given the frequency of the structural characteristics, instances of LVCs found in Malaysian L2 and British L1 student writing will be analysed. Prior to that, the distribution of LVCs which include the lemmas of all light verbs in the respective sub-corpus will be presented. The analysis of ICE-Malaysia generated 10 instances of GIVE LVCs, 4 instances of TAKE LVCs, 9 instances of MAKE LVCs, 4 instances of DO LVCs, and 6 instances of HAVE LVCs. On the contrary, the analysis of ICE-GB generated 10 instances of GIVE LVCs, 2 instances of TAKE LVCs, 7 instances of MAKE LVCs, no instances of DO LVCs, and 7 instances of HAVE LVCs. The small number of instances is attributable to the size of the sub-corpora used which is not more than 50,000 words. Using small learner corpora to analyse learner error is not unusual. Several corpora such as the Korean learner corpus (100 texts) and the Slovene learner corpus (128 texts totalling up to 35,000 words) created by Lee, Jang and Seo (2009) and Stritar (2009) are equally small. Despite their small size, the corpora generated data on various surface structure errors (Lee, et al., 2009) as well as orthographic, lexical, morphological, and structural errors (Stritar, 2009). In the current study, a clear difference is observable in Malaysian L2 students' overuse of MAKE and DO LVCs, as well as their underuse of the rest of the LVCs. Table 3 shows LVCs headed by DO, HAVE, MAKE, GIVE and TAKE produced by Malaysians L2 and British L1 students, respectively.

Firstly, the data from the ICE-Malaysia sub-corpus shows that most noun complements are isomorphic except *improvement, response, action, choice, consideration, decision, conclusion, analysis, and shopping*. In addition to the nominalised nouns, noun complements such as *names, hints, and gestures* taking inflectional 's are also in non-isomorphic form. Interestingly, in the ICE-GB sub-corpus, as evident in the right column of Table 3, *help, name, evidence, reason, access, date, approach, progress, influence, experience* are noun complements in isomorphic form and the remaining pluralised nouns including *reasons* and *changes* are in non-isomorphic form.



**Table 3. LVCs produced by Malaysian L2 and British L1 students.**

	Malaysian	British
GIVE	give many improvement, give names, give response, give the hint, give hints, gives the answer, gave us some advise, giving order, giving gentle hints	give any useful information, give adequate affirmation, give her any help, give the entry a name, give evidence, gives an example, gives a reason, gives 4 reasons, gave the initiate access, has been given the date
TAKE	take strict action, take a drive, take care, take a creative action	take all the initiative, takes the more economic approach
MAKE	make a choice, make a visit, make considerations, make use, makes all the decisions, made a big change, made a conclusion, made any attempts, making the same gestures	make judgements, make references, make the decisions, made references, made significantly better progress, made the necessary changes
DO	do an analysis, do analysis, doing further research	–
HAVE	have a different view, have a look, have a try, had a plan, having shopping	have a clear association, have a continuous, physical existence, have a necessity, has a corrupting influence, had some experience, had the protection, had very little influence

Secondly, in terms of the article preceding the noun complements, most LVCs take the indefinite article in both Malaysian L2 and British L1 student writing. LVCs taking zero articles are obvious in ICE-Malaysia sub-corpus regardless of light verbs (e.g., *give response*, *take care*, *make considerations*, and *do analysis*) whereas zero article LVCs in ICE-GB sub-corpus come from those headed by MAKE. Definite article LVC is the least favoured by both group of students.

Thirdly, as regards modifier, only two LVCs, *take strict action* and *take a creative action* from ICE-Malaysia sub-corpus seem to accept adjectives that can be adverbialised when written in their simplex verb forms. Single modifiers that co-occur with most LVCs namely, *gentle*, *big*, *same*, *further*, *different* are descriptive adjectives indicating object (i.e., noun complement in this study) quality reading. Similarly, modifiers that co-occur with LVCs produced by British L1 students are made up of descriptive adjectives (i.e., *adequate*, *initial*, *necessary*, *clear*, *corrupting*). Besides descriptive adjective, LVCs in both sub-corpora accept determiner, specifically quantifiers *many*, *some*, *all*, and *any* in the modifier slot. In other words, most LVCs that co-occur with single modifiers produced by Malaysian L2 and British L1 students could not be rewritten in simplex verb forms. Such modifiers are also extensively found in Giparaite's (2017) study on LVCs in native and non-native varieties of English. According to Brugman (2001) and Gradecak-Erdeljic (2009), descriptive adjectives and quantifiers in LVCs facilitate dissemination of specific information or verbal ideas. Disregarding LVCs accepting

modifiers without adverb in their simplex verb counterpart as practised by Dixon (2005), Hoffmann et al. (2011) and Shahrokny-Prehn and Hoche (2011) is not reasonable anymore.

Finally, regarding grammatical voice, all LVCs in both sub-corpora are in the active voice. There are three GIVE LVCs as evident in Table 3 taking object pronouns *us*, *her* and common noun, *the entry* as the first direct objects. This is in accordance with Dixon's (2005) claims that light verbs usually pair with two or more direct objects in a verb phrase, especially GIVE A construction.

### **Frequency of LVCs vs. Simplex Verb forms (noun complements from LVC counterpart) in Malaysian and British Student Writing**

To find out the choice between LVCs and their corresponding simplex verbs, the frequencies of all noun complements and their simplex verbs from ICE-Malaysia and ICE-GB sub-corpora were identified. Modifiers co-occurring with the LVCs were disregarded as it was not viable to generate simplex verbs alongside specific adverbs identified from the previous phase of analysis. It is necessary to emphasise that the interchangeability between LVCs and their corresponding simplex verbs is possible only at the syntactic level and it is semantically impossible to assume these two constructions are alike. Table 4 shows the occurrences of LVC and their corresponding simplex verbs in ICE-Malaysia and ICE-GB sub-corpora. The frequency of simplex verbs excludes their lemmas.

Looking at the frequencies listed in Table 4, simplex verbs like *use*, *visit*, *try*, *improve*, *change*, and *drive* are more prominent compared to their corresponding LVCs in Malaysian students' writings. In fact, the number of simplex verb forms is higher than the LVCs in both sub-corpora. Mehl (2017) and Bonial and Pollard (2020) recently discovered that simplex verbs are exceptionally common in their study. As mentioned earlier, simplex verbs and LVCs are not semantically equivalent because they convey different meaning. LVCs are infrequent because according to Bonial and Pollard (2020), they are used to express certain aspectual nuances through articles, pluralisation of noun complement, and modifiers.

A closer look at Table 4 shows that there are seven LVCs (i.e., *give\_hint*, *give\_advice*, *give\_order*, *do\_analysis*, *do\_research*, *have\_view*, *have\_plan*) from ICE-Malaysia and eleven LVCs (i.e. *give\_affirmation*, *give\_evidence*, *give\_example*, *give\_reason*, *give\_access*, *take\_initiative*, *take\_approach*, *make\_judgement*, *make\_progress*, *have\_necessity*, *have\_experience*) from ICE-GB sub-corpora respectively showing higher frequency counts than their simplex verb counterparts. Preference towards LVCs could be associated with the natural rhythm of the English language. According to Gradecak-Erdeljic (2009), the English language usually takes the subject – verb – object sequence; for example, “The computer does not **give a clear hint**...” is preferred to “The computer does not **clearly hint**...” It is also more natural to use LVCs with modifiers to convey specific information instead of using simplex verbs with adverbs as the latter is deemed clumsier (Sinclair & Fox, 1990).

**Table 4. Occurrences of LVC and their Corresponding Simplex Verbs.**

	Malaysian			British	
	LVC	Simplex Verb		LVC	Simplex Verb
GIVE_improvement : improve	1	11	GIVE_information : inform	1	1
GIVE_name : name	1	1	GIVE_affirmation : affirm	1	0
GIVE_response : respond	1	1	GIVE_help : help	1	10
GIVE_hint : hint	3	0	GIVE_name : name	1	2
GIVE_answer : answer	1	2	GIVE_evidence : evident	1	0
GIVE_advice : advise	2	0	GIVE_example : exemplify	2	0
GIVE_order : order	1	0	GIVE_reason : reason	2	0
TAKE_action : act	2	2	GIVE_access : access	1	0
TAKE_drive : drive	1	6	GIVE_date : date	1	2
TAKE_care : care	1	1	TAKE_initiative : initiate	1	0
MAKE_choice : choose	1	3	TAKE_approach : approach	1	0
MAKE_visit : visit	1	21	MAKE_judgement : judge	1	0
MAKE_consideration : consider	1	2	MAKE_reference : refer	3	4
MAKE_use : use	1	25	MAKE_decision : decide	1	3
MAKE_decision : decide	1	2	MAKE_progress : progress	1	0
MAKE_change : change	1	9	MAKE_change : change	1	7
MAKE_conclusion : conclude	1	3	HAVE_association : associate	1	3
MAKE_attempt : attempt	1	2	HAVE_existence : exist	1	8
MAKE_gesture : gesture	1	1	HAVE_necessity : necessitate	1	0
DO_analysis : analyse	3	1	HAVE_influence : influence	2	7
DO_research : research	1	0	HAVE_experience : experience	1	0
HAVE_view : view	1	0	HAVE_protection : protect	1	1
HAVE_look : look	1	4			
HAVE_try : try	2	12			
HAVE_plan : plan	1	0			
HAVE_shopping : shop	1	0			

## Discussion

The current investigation into LVC in ICE-Malaysia sub-corpus of student writing is unlike previous corpus-based studies on Malaysian student writing. Studies by Ang, et al. (2011), Roslina and Zuraidah (2013), Zarifi and Mukundan (2014) and Zuraidah and Srinivass (2017) reported various erroneous structures ranging from modals, multi-word units to cohesive devices. Instead of merely highlighting variation of LVCs in Malaysian student writing, this study compares them with LVCs in British student writing to examine over or under-representation of certain LVC forms.

LVCs with zero article are overused by Malaysian students, due to mother tongue interference. Most Malaysian L2 students' native language is either Malay, Chinese or Tamil. All these languages do not have indefinite and definite articles, and this may be the reason for the scarcity of articles in Malaysian student writing. The overuse of non-prototypical structure by non-native speakers compared to native speakers is often perceived as an indicator of error (Granger, 2015), however, it is not the case in this study. The use of zero articles in LVCs, for instance, *give names to non-existent objects* and *lexicographers to do analysis based on a large collection*, seems accurate. The LVC *give names* agrees with the subsequent prepositional phrase with plural noun. Evidence of overuse therefore should not be generalised as denoting erroneous forms. Granger (2015) supports this and advises researchers and teachers to avoid drawing certain conclusions because students fail to perform exactly like the native speakers.

Another interesting finding in this study is the acceptance of descriptive adjectives in LVCs among Malaysian L2 and British L1 students. Having seen the possibility of not only descriptive adjectives but also other determiners, particularly quantifiers co-occurring with LVCs shows that Vincze, Nagy, and Berend (2011) is correct in their observation about LVCs being syntactically flexible. Generalisations about potential adjectives co-occurring with LVCs can be made if there is a higher frequency of modifiers. To this end, larger learner corpora need to be employed, something to consider in future research in light verb, modifier, and noun complement combinations. The findings would be useful for teaching LVC structures.

In terms of LVCs and their corresponding simplex verb forms, the analysis shows that Malaysian students tend to overuse the simplex verb forms, especially the simplex verbs *visit*, *use*, and *try*. The use of simplex verbs among British L1 students is also prominent but its overall occurrence in their writing is approximately three times less than in the Malaysian student writing. This is not surprising because simplex verbs too appear to be more frequent than their LVC counterparts in Mehl (2017) and Bonial and Pollard's (2020) studies. It is worth mentioning that most instances of simplex verb constructions in Malaysian student writing do not co-occur with adverbs. They are usually used as the head word in verb phrases as shown in the examples below:

1. They are many choices places to **visit**, like Feringgi Beach, Penang Hill
2. In order to communicate effectively, we must **use** appropriate words.
3. Usually the company will **try** to use a combination of words that...
4. the pros provide an opportunity to **improve** language teaching
5. these words can be added affixes to the base to **change** their meanings

The interchangeability between LVC and its simplex verb forms requires more attention as it involves alteration in meaning. It is necessary to teach students to differentiate between these two constructions so that they are able to use them accurately. As this is not the focus of the

current study, future research in student writing should consider exploring the issue of students' understanding of the difference between LVCs and their corresponding simplex forms.

Findings of the current analysis suggest that Malaysian L2 university students have not fully grasped the use of LVCs, which accord previous studies by Altenberg and Granger (2001), Chi, et al. (1994), Juknevičienė (2008), and Laporte (2012). While there are several pedagogical implications of these findings for the Malaysian ELT scenario, the most pertinent is the need to incorporate the teaching of LVC and other lexico-grammar items in the English language curriculum. This is in line with Altenberg and Granger's (2001) view on the importance of enhancing L2 learners' knowledge of high-frequency verbs, including light verbs. They argue that these verbs are "encountered very early in instructional programmes and they are neglected after they have been taught" (2001, p.190). The lack of attention on high-frequency verbs is evident in the Malaysian ELT context. Both the Integrated English Language Syllabus for Primary schools or the KBSR (Malay acronym) introduced in 1982 and the Primary School Standards-Based Curriculum or the KSSR (Malay acronym) implemented in 2013 prioritise communication and English literacy skills. This is despite one of the learning outcomes required by the Curriculum Development Division (2011) which states that "students should be able to use correct and appropriate rules of grammar in speech and writing" at the end of the primary education (Hazita, 2016, p. 72). The emphasis on reading, phonics, penmanship, language arts, and higher order thinking skills in the KSSR (Hazita, 2016), unfortunately, is at the expense of grammatical enhancement in Malaysian primary school English education.

While Malaysian teachers are in favour of the KSSR because of its integration of various language skills aimed at strengthening students' foundation of the English language (Suriati, Tajularipin, & Suzieleez Syrene, 2017), negligence of grammatical knowledge in the early years of education is apparent and should be addressed immediately. There is an urgent need for some focus on emerging lexico-grammatical items in ELT materials in Malaysian classrooms. To this end, consciousness raising tasks such as filling-in-the blanks to raise awareness of words that can co-occur with LVCs and simplex verbs can be taught. At more advanced levels, following Lennon's (1996 as cited in Altenberg & Granger, 2001) suggestion, teachers can explain grammatical and lexical patterning involving high-frequency verbs in context. According to Eisouh (2012), these verbs should not be taught in isolation. One approach that can be adopted is concordance-based exercises extracted from Malaysian and/or native-speaker professional corpus which teachers can then use to teach students to identify and examine words that co-occur with light verbs DO, HAVE, MAKE, GIVE and TAKE.

## **Conclusion**

The quantitative results of the current study show that the structures of LVCs are generally similar in Malaysian and British student writing in that both groups of students seem to prefer the prototypical structure of LVC. The only notable difference is in their use of zero article LVCs and multiple modification. Malaysian students' tendency to use zero article LVCs could be attributed to mother-tongue influence. This finding is in line with Hoffmann, et al.'s (2011) and Mehl's (2017) studies on digitalised texts produced by Indians, Hong Kongers, and Singaporeans which also found high occurrences of LVCs with no article use. Researchers in the area of New Englishes suggest that this form of use should not be regarded as erroneous, but a form of structural nativisation common in new varieties of English.

The analysis also shows that simplex verb forms are more frequent in both the British and Malaysian student writing, which accord Mehl (2017) and Bonial and Pollard's (2020) findings. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there are slightly more LVCs in the Malaysian corpus than in the British corpus, possibly because of the subject-verb-object sequence in English (Gradecak-Erdeljic, 2009) that L2 students are familiar with. The overuse of LVCs headed by MAKE and DO and the underuse of LVCs headed by GIVE, TAKE, and HAVE are evident in L2 writing.

In conclusion, the analysis of the current study revealed that there are similarities in the use of LVCs among Malaysian L2 students and British L1 students. The detailed description of Malaysian students' grasp of DO, HAVE, MAKE, GIVE and TAKE LVCs provides new knowledge for English language material designers as well as teachers at all levels of English education. The findings also provide insights into how English language content and pedagogical approaches can be improved in both L1 and L2 contexts.

## About the Authors

**Christina Sook Beng Ong** is a faculty member at the Department of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Kampar Campus), Malaysia. Currently, a doctoral student at Universiti Sains Malaysia, her study is on Malaysian English and she is interested in the use of corpus-based method to study varieties of English.

**Hajar Abdul Rahim** is a professor of linguistics at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. Her current areas of research include Malaysian English, and culture in ELT.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the constructive comments by the anonymous reviewers. They would also like to thank Sean Wallis of the International Corpus of English Great Britain team for sharing the non-professional writing sub-corpus.

## To cite this article:

Ong, C. S. B. & Rahim, H. A. (2021). Analysis of light verb construction use in L1 and L2: Insights from British and Malaysian student writing. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 25(2). <https://tesl-ej.org/pdf/ej98/a1.pdf>

## References

- Adel, A. (2006). *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Ahour, T., & Mukundan, J. (2012). Errors and variations of TESL students' written description. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum*, 20(1), 55–64.
- Altenberg, B., & Granger, S. (2001). The grammatical and lexical patterning of MAKE in native and non-native student writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 22(2), 173-195.

- Ang, L.H., Hajar, A.R., Tan, K.H., & Khazriyati, S. (2011). Collocations in Malaysian English learners' writing: A corpus-based error analysis. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 17 (Special Issue), 31–44.
- Anthony, L. (2018). AntConc (Version 3.5.7) [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software>
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Bonial, C., & Pollard, A. K. (2020). Choosing an event description: What a PropBank study reveals about the contrast between light verb constructions and counterpart synthetic verbs. *Journal of Linguistics*, 56 (3), 1–24.
- Botley, S. P. (2010). *A corpus-based comparison of idiom used by Malaysian, British and American students*. Presented at 2010 International Conference on Science and Social Research (CSSR 2010), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Botley, S.P., & Dillah, D. (2007). Investigating spelling errors in a Malaysian learner corpus. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 3, 74-93.
- Brugman, C. (2001). Light verbs and polysemy. *Language Sciences*, 23, 551–78.
- Charanjit, K. S. S., Amreet, K. J. S., Nur Qistina, A. R., & Ravinthar, T. (2017). Grammar errors made by ESL tertiary students in writing. *English Language Teaching*, 10(5), 16-27.
- Chi, A. M-L., Wong, K. P-Y., & Wong, M. C-P. (1994). Collocational problems amongst ESL learners: A corpus-based study. *Joint Seminar on Corpus Linguistics and Lexicology, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, 1994, Language Centre, HKUST, Hong Kong. Proceedings, Entering Text*, 157-165. Retrieved from <https://repository.vtc.edu.hk/ive-la-sp/17>
- Curriculum Development Division (2011). Standard document of Primary school curriculum: Basic core module of English Language for National Schools. Putrajaya: Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Dixon, R.M.W. (2005). She gave him a look, they both had a laugh and then took a stroll: Give a verb, have a verb and take a verb constructions. In R. M. W. Dixon (Ed.), *A semantic approach to English grammar* (pp. 459–83). Oxford University Press.
- Eisouh, Z. (2012). Jordan university students' performance on the verbs make and do. *College Student Journal*, 46(1), 158-173.
- Gradecak-Erdeljic, T. (2009). Iconicity of the verbal expression – The case of “light” verbs in English. In M. Brdar, M. Omazic, V.P. Takac (Eds.), *Cognitive approaches to English: Fundamental, methodological, interdisciplinary and applied aspects* (pp. 3-26). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Granger, S. (2015). Contrastive interlanguage analysis: A reappraisal. *International Journal of Learner Corpus Research*, 1(1), 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ijlcr.1.1.01gra>
- Gedion, A., Tati, J. S., & Peter, J. C. (2016). A syntactic errors analysis in the Malaysian ESL learners' written composition. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 3(6), 96-104.

- Hazita, A. (2016). Implementation and challenges of English Language Education Reform in Malaysian primary schools. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 22(3), 65-78
- Hoffmann, S., Hundt, M., & Mukherjee, J. (2011). Indian English — an emerging epicentre? A pilot study on light verbs in web-derived corpora of South Asian Englishes. *Anglia*, 129(3-4), 258-280.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G.K. (2002). *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge University Press.
- International Corpus of English. (2016). <http://ice-corpora.net/ice/index.html>
- Juknevičienė, R. (2008). Collocations with high frequency verbs in learner English: Lithuanian learners vs. Native speakers. *Kalbotyra*, 59(3), 119-127. <https://etalpykla.lituanistikadb.lt/object/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2008~1367165953010/J.04~2008~1367165953010.pdf>
- Kearns, K. (2002). Light verbs in English (Manuscript). MIT. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.132.29&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Khazriyati, S., Tan, K.H., & Marlyna, M. (2006). Definiteness and indefiniteness: A contrastive analysis of the use of determiners between the Malay language and English. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 6(1), 21-30.
- Krishnasamy, J. (2015). Grammatical error analysis in writing of ESL diploma students. *Asian Journal of Education and e-Learning*, 3(1), 51-60.
- Laporte, S. (2012). Mind the gap! Bridge between world Englishes and learner Englishes in the making. *English Text Construction*, 5(2), 264–291. <https://doi.org/10.1075/etc.5.2.05lap>
- Lee, S-H., Jang, S.B., & Seo, S-K. (2009). Annotation of Korean learner corpora for particle error detection. *CALICO Journal*, 26(3), 529-544. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/calicojournal.26.3.529>
- Leech, G., Hund, M., Mair, C., & Smith, N. (2009). *Change in contemporary English: A grammatical study*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lim, H-P. (1976). Errors and error analysis in TESL: The Malaysian experience. *RELC Journal*, 7(2), 23-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F003368827600700203>
- Marco, M. J. L. (2011). Exploring atypical verb + noun combinations in learner technical writing. *International Journal of English Studies*, 11(2), 77-95. <https://doi.org/10.6018/ijes/2011/2/149651>
- Marlyna, M., Tan, K.H., & Khazriyati, S. (2007). Interference in learning English: Grammatical errors in English essay writing among rural Malay secondary school students in Malaysia. *Jurnal e-Bangi*, 2(2), 1-15.
- Mehl, S. (2017). Light verb semantics in the International Corpus of English: Onomasiological variation, identity evidence and degrees of lightness. *English Language and Linguistics*, 1, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674317000302>
- Nelson, G. (1996). The design of the corpus. In S. Greenbaum (Ed.), *Comparing English worldwide: The International Corpus of English* (pp. 27–35). Clarendon Press.



- Ronan, P., & Schneider, G. (2015). Determining light verb constructions in contemporary British and Irish English. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 20(3), 326–54. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.20.3.03ron>
- Roslina, A., & Zuraidah, M. D. (2013). The be verb omissions among advance L1-Malay ESL learners: What corpus-based study can reveal. *Learner Corpus Studies in Asia and the World*, 1, 121-138.
- Saadiah, D., & Subramaniam, K. (2009). Error analysis of the written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(3), 483-495.
- Saadiah, D., & Khor, H.C. (2009). Common errors in written English essays of form One Chinese students: A case study. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(2), 242-253.
- Sanguannam, S. (2017). A study of “delexical verb+noun” collocation errors of Thai EFL intermediate and advanced learners. *Journal of Liberal Arts*, 17(2), 59-84.
- Shahrokny-Prehn, A., & Hoche, S. (2011). Rising through the registers – A corpus-based account of the stylistic constraints on light verb constructions. *Corpus*, 10(2011), 239-257. <https://doi.org/10.4000/corpus.2110>
- Sinclair, J., & Fox, G. (1990). *Collins Cobuild English grammar*. Collins.
- Siti Hamin, S., & Mohd Mustafa, I. (2010). Analysis of errors in subject-verb agreement among Malaysian ESL learners. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 16(1), 56-73.
- Stritar, M. (2009). Slovene as a foreign language: The pilot learner corpus perspective. *Slovene Linguistic Studies*, 7(2009), 135-162. <https://doi.org/10.17161/SLS.1808.5274>
- Suriati, S., Tajularipin, S., & Suzieleez Syrene A.R. (2017). Teachers’ perceptions of the Standard-based English Language Curriculum in Malaysian primary schools. *International Journal of Instruction*, 10(3), 195-208.
- Vincze, V., Nagy, I.T., & Berend, G. (2011). Detecting noun compounds and light verb constructions: a contrastive study. Paper presented at the Workshop on Multiword Expressions: From Parsing and Generation to the Real World (MWE 2011), Portland, Oregon, USA.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1982). Why can you have a drink when you can’t \*have an eat? *Language*, 58(4), 753–799. <https://doi.org/10.2307/413956>
- Zarifi, A., & Mukundan, J. (2014). Creativity and unnaturalness in the use of phrasal verbs in ESL learner language. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 20(3), 51-62.
- Zuraidah, M. D., & Srinivass, S. (2017). Conjunctive adjuncts in Malaysian undergraduate ESL essays: Frequency and manner of use. *Moderna spark*, 1, 99-117.

Copyright rests with authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.

