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Helping ESL Students to Sound More Idiomatic: Grammar Checker

The mastery of *formulaic sequences* such as multiword units, idioms, collocations, proverbs, or sentence frames is one important component of successful learning of a second language. A grammar checker could help students be more idiomatic when they are writing. We will present here one such piece of software. *Grammar checker* is a grammar and spelling checker of texts written in English. Native and non-native speakers can use it. Unlike some other grammar checkers, this software identifies potential errors through statistical analysis, rather than using tagging and parsing, and it compares combinations of words used with a reference corpus of 80 million words of correct English. Those phrases which do not occur or occur infrequently in the corpus are highlighted. In many cases the reason they do not occur or occur only rarely is that they contain an error. Clicking on a word enables the user to see which words typically follow it and which words typically precede it. Its main limitation is that it does not detect mistakes that cannot be found by the analysis of adjacent words, but in the case of formulaic language, as we are dealing with multi-word strings, this is less of a problem. *Grammar checker* attempts to harness the new technologies to deliver a learning experience which it is difficult for a teacher or a book to provide. The aim is to enable students working independently of a teacher to self-correct their mistakes while seeing them as learning opportunities, and to become sensitive to native speakers' preferences.

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