

**استخدام الافعال المتسلسلة في كتابة المقالات
من قبل طلاب اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية
على مستوى الجامعة**

**The Use of Catenative Verbs in Essay
Writing by EFL
Students at University Level**

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة استخدام الافعال المتسلسلة (Catenative Verbs) في كتابة المقالات من قبل طلاب الجامعة الذين يدرسون اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية. الافعال المتسلسلة والتي يتبعها افعال اخرى اما بصيغة (to+مصدر) او بصيغة (ing) وتلعب دورا مهما في تعقيد الجمل والطلاقة فيها. تهدف الدراسة الى تحديد مدى تكرار ودقة وتنوع استخدام هذه الافعال في مقالات الطلاب، واستكشاف التحديات التي يواجهها متعلمو اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في استخدامها. تم اجراء تحليل نوعي وكمي على مجموعة من المقالات التي كتبها طلاب جامعيون، تشير النتائج الى وجود تنوع محدود في استخدام الافعال المتسلسلة، مع وجود اخطاء متكررة في انماط التكميل الفعلي (verb complementation patterns). تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على الحاجة الى تعليم اكثر تركيزا على تراكيب الافعال المتسلسلة ضمن مناهج الكتابة الاكاديمية، وتقترح استراتيجيات تعليمية لتحسين دقتها في الاستخدام.

Abstract

This study investigate the use of catenative verbs in essay writing by university –level students of English as a foreign language (EFL). Catenative verbs, which are followed by other verbs in either the to-infinitive or the ing-form, play a crucial role in sentence complexity and fluency. The present study aims at identifying the frequency ,accuracy, and range of catenative verbs usage in students' essays, and to explore potential challenges EFL learners face in their application. A qualitative and quantitative analysis was conducted on a corpus of essays written by undergraduate EFL students. Findings indicate a limited variety of catenative verbs used, with frequent errors in verb complementation patterns. The study highlights the need for more focused instruction on catenative verb structures in academic writing curricula and suggests pedagogical strategies for improving their accurate usage.



1- Introduction

In English there is a particular group of verbs having a particular feature, which sets them apart from other verbs. This feature is the ability of those verbs to be combined with other verbs, forming a chain. Such verbs are named catenative verbs. This term is taken from the Latin word 'catena' which means 'a chain'.

In English such verbs like (ask, keep, promise, help, want, and seem) among many others are examples of catenative verbs (Internet 1). Examples:

- I agree to try making more effect .
- She determined to work hard.
- We try to rent a house near the university.
- Jane seems to agree to stop trying to reject eating eggs.

Jespersen(1924) was among the first to recognize the phenomenon of verb chaining in English describing structures that allow multiple verbs to appear sequentially. He classified some catenative constructions under his broader analysis of verb complementation.

Huddleston (1997:209) states that catenative verbs is one of the most problematic areas of English grammar. He claims that catenative verbs are present in "most cases where a non – finite clause is an internal complement of a verb " (Ibid). He approves his claim by giving the following examples of non – catenative complements:

- David began the journey. (object complement)
- David seemed a keen student. (predicate complement)
- David hoped for a successful outcome. (prep.complement)

Other examples of non – catenative verbs are:

- She entered laughing.

The participle word (laughing) is just a description of how she entered (Thomson and Martinet,1986:235).

- He stopped to check the time.

In this example (to check) looks like a to – infinitive but it is not. In fact, such a sentence is what some grammarians call the infinitive of purpose. The original sentence is:

- He stopped in order to check the time.

In this example:

- He went to work



The word (to) is a preposition of place followed by a noun. The real meaning of the above sentence is:

- He went in order to work .

Another example of non – catenative verb is the following:

- I allowed him to leave.

The above example shows that the chain has been broken by the insertion of the object pronoun (him) changing the structure into non – catenative structure. The following is a list of non – catenative verbs:

Advise	Coach	Convince	Employ	Expect
Ask	Coerce	Counsel	Encourage	Forbid
Beg	Command	Direct	Enjoin	Force
Beseech	Compel	Drive	Exhort	Good
Hire	Persuade	Require		
Implore	Press	Summon		
Incite	Pressur (is) e	Teach		
Induce	Prompt	Tell		
Instruct	Provoke	Train		
Invite	Push	Urge		
Order	Remind	* warn		
Pay				

(Internet 2)

The above verbs cannot be catenative in the active form, but only in the passive form they can be catenative

- She was compelled to leave.
- They were paid to go.

According to Kosur (2011) it is deeply problematic to construct a sentence consisting of a catenative verb or several ones in English. He further precedes by claiming that in English there is a common type of construction called catenative ,(chain-like) where a sequence of NP1+VP1+(NP2)+(VP2)occurs, VP2 being non-finite. Since there are two VPs there must be two Ps and therefore, two clauses , a finite clause and non- finite one.

Catenative verbs are considerably similar to modal and quasi modal verbs in form and function. All of them precede other verbs which exist in one sentence, e.g.:

- David should do his homework. (modal)
- David would rather stay at a hotel.(quasi modal)
- David wants to borrow my car.(catenative)



Despite the obvious similarity between catenative verbs and modals and quasi- modals, catenative verbs function as the head of the verb phrase , whereas the others function as the verb phrase complement or a direct object and their function as modals is within the verb phrase.

Another important difference between the above mentioned verbs is the infinitive marker (to) after catenative verbs which functions as a prepositional particle after quasi-modal verbs. Adding to that catenative verbs have up to six conjugations depending on the regularity and irregularity of the verb, e.g.:

Try (base) ,to try (infinitive) ,try, tries(present) ,tried (past tense) ,trying(present participle) ,tried(past participle).

2-Objectives :

The primary objectives of the present study are:

- 1-To assess university students' initial ability to use catenative verbs in essay writing.
- 2-To determine the effectiveness of targeted intervention in improving students' use of catenative verbs.
- 3-To compare the performance of an experimental group (who receive intervention) and a control group (who do not receive intervention).

3- Hypotheses:

The present study hypothesizes the following points:

- 1-Third –year students in the English Department \ College of Basic Education use a limited range of catenative verbs in their essay writing.
- 2-Students frequently make errors in the use of catenative verbs complementation (e.g., confusion between to- infinitive and –ing forms).
- 3-There is a significant correlation between students' overall English proficiency and their correct usage of catenative verbs in academic writing.
- 4-Explicit instructions on catenative verbs leads to improved accuracy and variety in their use in EFL tudents' essays.

4- Value of the Study

- 1- The present study can pinpoint specific areas of difficulty students may face with catenative verbs, such as misuse of verb forms, incorrect complements, or limited variety and therefore find solutions to improve their grammatical accuracy.
- 2- The findings of the present study can inform curriculum design and teaching methodologies, encouraging more explicit instructions on the use of cantenative verbs and their role in formal writing.



- 3- The study also sheds light on challenges faced by non – native English speaking students due to linguistic transfer or limited exposure provide more inclusive and effective language support.
- 4- Mastery of catenative verbs, enhances students' ability to express complex ideas and arguments effectively, which is essential for success in academic writing and beyond.

5- Catenative verbs VS. Full verbs

Nordquist (2010) states that there are various differences between lexical or full verbs and catenative verbs. The most important of these differences are of the following:

- 1- lexical verbs are those verbs that can stand alone on their own in a sentence. Such verbs express the main action or state, e.g.:
 - He swims everyday

The verb (swim) bears the whole meaning without needing additional verb to complete the meaning.

Catenative verbs, on the other hand, are verbs that cannot stand alone to convey the entire meaning. They often require other verbs to chain with and complete their meaning, e.g.

- She wants to go

- 2- Full verbs change form to reflect mood, and voice ,e.g.:

- I read
- He runs
- They slept

Catenative verbs, on the other hand, contrasts a non – finite complement

- 3- Full verbs usually function as the main verbs expressing the main action in the sentence, e.g.:

- She reads a novel every night.
- They built a house in 1990.
- He is happy.

Catenative verbs may not express the main action in the sentence but can represent a preliminary or preparatory step.

- 5- Catenative verbs sometimes lead to more complex verb changes when combined with other verbs, e.g.:



- She decided to try to finish the project.

Full verbs on the other hand do not lead to verb chains because they do not allow other verbs to follow them as a complement. They involve simpler structure, e.g.:

- She sings beautifully
- She finished the project.

6-Catenative Verbs VS. Modal and Quasi Modal Verbs

Catenative verbs resemble modal and quasi- modal verbs in form and function. Like modals and quasi –modals ,catenative verbs precede another verb,for example:

- They might be late. (modal)
- They ought to come early. (quasi –modal)
- She wants to sit down. (catenative)

While catenative verbs function as the head of the verb phrase within the sentence , modals and quasi- modals function as modals within the sentence(Scudder, 2009: 2).The verb that follows the catenative usually functions as either a verb phrase complement or as a direct object .For example:

- They decided to go to the party. (verb phrase complement)
- He prefers to drink tea. (direct object)
- They should exercise regularly. (modal as verb phrase head)

Another clear difference between catenative verbs and modal and quasi- modal verbs is that the preposition (to) functions as particle in quasi-modals and as infinitive marker following catenative verbs .For example:

- She wants to study abroad next year.
- You ought to apologize for your mistake.

7-Simple and Complex Catenative Verbs

Huddleston and Pullum (2005)distinguishes between two types of catenative constructions :simple and complex constructions. In the simple catenative constructions the non- finite clause has no subject and there is no intervening NP that can be understood as object. The subject of the non-finite clause is the same as the subject of the main clause. For example:

- David wanted to leave early.



In the above example the verb “decide” is the catenative verb, “to leave” is the non- finite clause , and the subject “David” is also understood as the subject of “to leave”.

Complex catenative verbs on the other hand require an object (a noun or pronoun) between the main verb and the following verb .This noun or pronoun serves as the object of the main verb and the logical subject of the non- finite verb. For example:

-She persuaded him to leave early.

In the above example “persuaded” is the catenative verb, the pronoun “him” is the object of :persuaded” and the subject of “to leave” ,”to-leave” is the non-finite verb phrase ,and “she” performs the action, but “him” is the one who actually “leave”.

8- Classification of Catenative verbs

According to Quirk et al.(1985) , Hasselgrad et al.(2001) and Yule (2006) catenative verbs can be classified into four main types:

1- bare – infinitive:

- He helped wash up
- I leaned that you just have to let go sometimes
- I’m coming to help wash the dishes.

2- Verbs that only take to – infinitive e.g.(refuse, agree, deserve, manage, arrange, expect, mean, threaten, attempt, hope, offer, want, decide, learn, pretend, wish, demand, promise).

- I want to sleep
- They hope to visit soon
- He wants to go to London

3- Verbs that only take gerund (- ing), e.g.(can’t help, practice, avoid, finish, risk, (don’t)mind, go on, miss, can’t stand, deny, give up, postpone, stop.

- He keeps talking about it
- He enjoys swimming
- They considered leaving early



4- Catenative verbs that take both infinitive and gerund ,e.g.(start, love, hate, begin, cannot bear, like, continue).

- She began to cry – She began crying
- He continued to speak – He continued speaking
- Ann began to clean the room yesterday- Ann began cleaning the room yesterday.

According to Eastwood (2006) some catenative verbs can be followed by to – infinitive or the present participle. Sometimes there is a change in meaning, sometimes not. Verbs with no change in meaning: love, start, begin, continue, hate, prefer, like. Examples:

- They continued working on the project
- They continued to work on the project
- I love hanging out with you
- I love to hang out with you.

Verbs with obvious change in meaning are: (go on, regret, need, come, remember, try). Examples:

- She forgot to call her friend

(She didn't remember to do it, so the call didn't happen)

- She forget calling her friend earlier

(She already called her friend but now she doesn't remember doing it).

9-Methodology:

The present study is mainly intended to investigate to what extent college students are able to use catenative verbs in essay writing. The sample chosen for the study consists of 40 students all are third year students in the English Department / College of Basic Education during the academic year 2024 – 2025. The sample students are divided and randomly into two groups namely the experimental group and the control group according to Campbell & Stanly sample(1963). Before any instructional intervention, both the experimental and the control group were asked to write an essay prompt ,ensuring uniformity in content and difficulty level. The topic is chosen to assess key aspects of writing, such as coherence ,structure ,grammar ,vocabulary ,and argumentation. The



students were given a fixed amount of time (50 minutes) to complete the essay under exam –like condition.

Following the pre-instruction essay task , the experimental group undergo a targeted writing intervention, while the control group continued with regular instructions without additional support. The intervention given to the experimental group focused on key weaknesses identified in the pre- instruction essays, explanation of catenative verb patterns ,practice exercises on correct verb combinations, error correction and feedback on common mistakes, and integration of catenative verbs in writing essays.The intervention lasted for (four weeks) ,with multiple sessions designed to enhance writing skills systematically.

In the post- intervention phase , both the experimental and control group were asked to write another essay under the same conditions as the initial task. In order to assess progress the students were asked to write on a similar topic. The post- intervention assays were assessed using the same rubric as the pre- instruction essays. Scores from both phases are compered to determine improvement in writing quality.

According to the pre-test results shown in tables (1 &2) ,both groups had similar levels of proficiency in using catenative verbs before the intervention. The results of both groups are closely similar (39.04) for the experimental group ,and (38.09)for the control group(see table 4). The most common errors made by students in both groups are (wrong verb choice, incorrect verb form, omission of verb, misuse of to- infinitive and gerund) as shown in table 3.

In the post-test the experimental group showed significant improvement in all metrics. The accuracy rate increased from(39.04 to 82.94) in the experimental group, while the control group showed only minor improvement (38.09 to 46.79) see table 7.



Table (1)
Pre-Test Results (Experimental Group)

Student ID	Total catenative verbs used	Correct Verbs	Incorrect Verbs	Accuracy (%)
Student (1)	8	5	3	62%
Student (2)	5	1	4	20%
Student (3)	7	4	3	57%
Student (4)	6	3	3	50%
Student (5)	5	2	3	40%
Student (6)	4	1	3	25%
Student (7)	7	4	3	58 %
Student (8)	8	4	4	50%
Student (9)	5	Non	5	0%
Student (10)	4	2	2	50%
Student (11)	10	4	6	40 %
Student (12)	9	3	6	34%
Student (13)	7	4	3	58%
Student (14)	10	4	6	40%
Student (15)	4	non	4	0%
Student (16)	10	3	7	30%
Student (17)	11	5	6	45%
Student (18)	8	2	6	25%
Student (19)	9	4	5	44%
Student (20)	9	2	7	22%



Table (2)
Pre-Test Results (Control Group)

Student ID	Total catenative verbs used	Correct Verbs	Incorrect Verbs	Accuracy (%)
Student (1)	١١	٦	٥	54%
Student (2)	٨	٤	٤	٥٠%
Student (3)	6	2	4	33%
Student (4)	5	3	2	60%
Student (5)	8	2	6	25%
Student (6)	6	3	3	50%
Student (7)	5	Non	5	0%
Student (8)	9	3	6	33%
Student (9)	10	3	7	30%
Student (10)	4	2	2	50%
Student (11)	10	4	6	40 %
Student (12)	8	2	6	25%
Student (13)	2	Non	2	0%
Student (14)	5	3	2	60%
Student (15)	5	2	3	40%
Student (16)	3	Non	3	0%
Student (17)	6	2	4	33%
Student (18)	7	2	5	28%
Student (19)	4	3	1	75%
Student (20)	4	2	2	50%



Table (3)
Error Type for both Groups

Error Type	Experimental Group (Total Error)	Control Group (Total Error)
Wrong Verb Choice	10	12
Incorrect Verb Form	12	10
Omission of Verb	15	12
Misuse of to-infinitive and gerund	50	44

Table (4)
Pre –Test Results (Before Intervention)

Group	No. of Students	Total Verbs Used	Correct Verbs	Incorrect Verbs	Accuracy (%)
Experimental	20	146	57	89	$(57 \div 146 \times 100) = 39.04$
Control	20	126	48	78	$(48 \div 126 \times 100) = 38.09$

Table (5)
Post-Test Results (After Intervention for Experimental Group)

Student ID	Total catenative verbs used	Correct Verbs	Incorrect Verbs	Accuracy (%)
Student (1)	14	12	2	85.7%
Student (2)	15	13	2	86.7%
Student (3)	12	10	2	83.3%



Student (4)	13	10	3	76.9%
Student (5)	14	12	2	85.7%
Student (6)	13	10	3	76.9%
Student (7)	15	13	2	86.7%
Student (8)	12	10	2	83.3%
Student (9)	10	8	2	80.0%
Student (10)	11	9	2	81.8%
Student (11)	12	10	2	83.3%
Student (12)	14	11	3	87.6%
Student (13)	15	12	3	80.0%
Student (14)	13	11	2	84.6 %
Student (15)	10	9	1	90.0 %
Student (16)	9	7	2	77.8%
Student (17)	16	14	2	87.5%



Student (18)	13	11	2	84.6%
Student (19)	12	10	2	83.3%
Student (20)	15	12	3	80.0 %

Table (6)
Post-Test Results (Control Group)

Student ID	Total catenative verbs used	Correct Verbs	Incorrect Verbs	Accuracy (%)
Student (1)	8	3	4	38%
Student (2)	7	3	4	42%
Student (3)	10	4	6	40%
Student (4)	6	3	3	50%
Student (5)	9	4	5	44%
Student (6)	8	3	5	38%
Student (7)	7	3	4	42%



Student (8)	10	6	4	60%
Student (9)	9	5	4	56%
Student (10)	7	3	4	42%
Student (11)	8	4	4	50%
Student (12)	7	4	3	56%
Student (13)	6	3	3	50%
Student (14)	9	4	5	45%
Student (15)	7	3	4	42%
Student (16)	10	6	4	25%
Student (17)	9	2	7	22%
Student (18)	6	3	3	50%
Student (19)	9	5	4	56%
Student (20)	4	2	2	50%



Table (7)
Post –Test Results (After Intervention)

Group	No. of Students	Total Verbs Used	Correct Verbs	Incorrect Verbs	Accuracy (%)
Experimental	20	258	214	44	$(214 \div 258 \times 100) = 82.94$
Control	20	156	73	83	$(73 \div 156 \times 100) = 46.79$

7-Discussion and Findings:

After subjecting the sample students to the two tests ,it has been found that:

- 1- targeted intervention significantly enhanced students' ability to use catenative verbs,
- 2-explicit instruction and focused practice were key contributions to improvement ,
- 3-the experimental group students exhibited greater confidence in using complex sentence structure, as observed in qualitative analysis, and
- 4-the control group showed only minimal improvement which implicates that regular exposure without explicit instructions ineffective in mastering catenative verbs.

7- Conclusions and pedagogical implications:

The present study has come out with some significant conclusions. According to the previous hypotheses the researcher assumes that third - year students face difficulties in using catenative verbs in essay writing. The difficulty is due to the avoidance of using complex catenative verb structures.

The hypothesis proved its validity because both groups had similar levels of difficulty using catenative verbs in the pre-test. In the post- test the experimental group improved significantly while the control group showed only marginal gains. The present study proves that explicit grammar instructions significantly improve students' ability to use catenative verbs in essay writing .Without targeted intervention ,students struggle to improve naturally ,reinforcing the need for structured learning approaches in university curricular. It also improves that teaching grammar in context is crucial for writing development and regular feedback and structured exercises help students internalize complex structures like catenative verbs.



According to the previous conclusions the following pedagogical implications should be taken into consideration:

- 1-Catenative verbs and their complementation patterns (e.g., want to go, enjoy going) should be explicitly taught as a distinct grammatical category. Many students struggle with these verbs due to their syntactic complexity and irregularities, so direct instructions can help raise awareness and accuracy.
- 2-Integrating catenative verbs into writing tasks and real –world communication contexts will help students understand their functional use. Teachers should provide writing exercises that incorporate common catenative verbs to reinforce both form and meaning.
- 3-Teachers should provide regular , focused feedback on students’ use of catenative verbs in writing. Highlighting common errors (e.g., ‘decide going’ instead of ‘decide to go’) can help learners internalize correct patterns.
- 4-Authentic reading materials (e.g., essays, articles, stories)should be used to expose students to natural usage of catenative verbs. This helps learners notice patterns and broaden their vocabulary.



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