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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY ON THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF ENGLISH COLLOCATION BY THE FOREIGN STUDENTS AT SHIATS

MOHAMED ESSA ELTAHIR ALI

SHIATS, DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY, ALLAHABAD, INDIA

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*Corresponding Author

MOHAMED ESSA
ELTAHIR ALI

Abstract

English and Arabic belong to different families, while Arabic is a member of the Semitic family, English belongs to the Indo-European language family, consequently, it is not surprising that Arab students of English as a foreign language face difficulty in learning English in general, and commit major mistakes in misunderstanding of collocation in particular. The aim of this study is an attempt to raise the Foreign Postgraduate students' awareness in learning English collocation. It also will help them using collocations in a proper way to avoid committing errors. The interest in using collocations comes from their using of the language. Collocations play a vital role in the coherence of the structure of language. The present study hypothesizes that the foreign students encounter difficulties in using English collocations. So, the research is an attempt to diagnose these difficulties and present solutions. Collocations have been recognized as one of the ways that differentiate native speakers and second language learners alike. This research, A study of the Misunderstandings of English Collocations faced by the Foreign Postgraduate students at SHIATS (Deemed to be University), Allahabad, is an attempt to minimize students collocational errors which may cause miscommunication between the SL (Source Language) and the TL (Target Language). The research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter consists of a brief historical background of collocation, Collocations in Arabic, Different types of collocation (lexical collocation and grammatical collocation). The second chapter contains a review of literature. In the third chapter, the researcher dealt with a section regarding methodology. The fourth chapter consists of Findings and Results. In the fifth chapter, the researcher discussed Summary and Conclusion. Finally, the researcher concluded that lexical collocation are easier than grammatical collocation for the foreign students who were involved in the survey in this study.

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INTRODUCTION

This study on the Misunderstandings of English Collocations faced by the foreign Students at SHIATS. The aim of this study is an attempt to raise the foreign students' awareness in learning English collocations. It also will help to use collocations in a proper way to avoid committing errors. The interest in using collocations comes from their great importance in language. Collocations play a vital role in the coherence of the structure of language. Collocations are also the source of language attraction and its special flavor, which makes it more beautiful and more powerful. Learning collocations is an everlasting struggle to match the proper nouns with the proper verbs, the proper verbs with the proper nouns, or the proper adjectives with the proper nouns.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The word collocation is a relatively new addition to the lexicon of English but defining collocation is a challenge since the term collocation has been a common concern among linguists, lexicographers and language pedagogues recently. However, it is not possible to discuss all these perspectives in this study. Therefore the researcher mentions some basic and general views regarding collocations in this issue. **Wilkins (1972)** asserts that there is not much value in either in being able to produce grammatical sentences if one has not got the vocabulary that is needed to convey what one wishes to say. **Ballinger and Sears (1981)** assert that collocation may involve other with the normal senses of all the words in a string but without the easy possibility of substituting some same meaning. They regarded collocations as "a kind of habitual association of words" and asserted that collocations resulted from native speakers' experiences of the expressions, repeated again and again certain given circumstances. Therefore, depending on the context, the collocation, like good chance, high probability, and strong likelihood, might be considered acceptable, but collocations like strong chance, good probability and high likelihood, unacceptable. **Benson (1985)** explained that some collocations are not difficult to use in Arabic. The problem for the students is that they must be able to recognize the sound of the animal, insect, or thing required in Arabic. The solution is that they must know the name of the sound in question in the target language, which is possible for students. **Cruse (1986)**

According to Cruse, the essential difference is that an idiom is a "lexical complex which is semantically simplex"; while in collocation each lexical constituent is also a semantic constituent. In other words, a collocation is semantically complex collocations. **McCarthy**

(1995) pointed out that "Even very advanced learners often make inappropriate or unacceptable collocations. Here, the role of L1 influence could be one of the major causes of errors in the production of L2 collocations (e.g., Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Biskup, 1992; Hussein, 1990). Therefore, EFL/ESL learners with different levels of proficiency may face difficulties with regard to collocations. Failing to produce the correct ones in English may result in a language that does not sound native-like or 'natural'.

Lewis (1997) states that one major principle of the Lexical approach is that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar" (ibid). In other words, language consists of chunks not individual words. Collocations are considered as a central linguistic idea of the lexical approach. Teaching words with other partner-words rather than teaching individual vocabulary. Firstly, vocabularies do not normally occur as separate words in texts but they occur in relation with other words and this probably makes it difficult to teach the possible partners that a single word may take. Secondly, it is considered easier to teach the language as a whole and then break it down to its basic components rather than teaching individual words and asking learners to construct sentences. **Schmitt (2000)** expresses that the major thrust is to make teachers create the consciousness of collocations in learners. Language learners become conscious of...what they pay attention to, what they notice...influences and in some ways determine the outcome of their learning".

Nation (2001) expresses that the strongest position is that language knowledge is Collocation knowledge because the stored sequences of words are the bases of learning, knowledge and use. He also states that collocations play a vital role in language. They are its beautiful part, and inject a refreshing spirit in it. They are present and inevitable in any kind of text with no exception. Hence their importance in understanding English collocations. The reason is collocation'.

Prodromou, (2004) reported that Knowing the meaning of a word not only requires knowing its dictionary definition; one must also know the type of words with which it is often associated. Collocations, either fixed or more flexible, are the result of many years of habitual use by fluent speakers of the English.

Koosha and Jafarpour (2006) confirmed the influence of L1 on acquiring collocation of prepositions by Iranian EFL adult learners. Furthermore, Namvar et al.'s research also analyzed the collocations in the Iranian postgraduate students' writings and found that negative transfer is a common phenomenon among Iranian language collocational errors. **Rezvani (2011)**

Based on **Rezvani's** research, the learners who received input enhancement treatment made significant gains with regard to the acquisition of grammatical collocations. He also revealed that output tasks lead to significant acquisition of grammatical collocations by Iranian EFL learners.

As-Safi (2012) examined responses associated with processing prepositions compared to literal sentences. He used a new strategy which, according to him, helps him in the process of rendition of English preposition into Arabic. By

employing the above strategy, As-Safi adds, "English prepositions are lexicalized instead of being replaced literally by Arabic equivalent prepositions."

METHODOLOGY:

The study was conducted on the Basis of questionnaire prepared and given to fifty foreign postgraduate students randomly selected from SHIATS (Deemed-to-be-University), Allahabad) 2014-2015. The present study analyzes the problem of The Misunderstanding of English Collocation faced by the Foreign Students at SHIATS. The researcher prepared a questionnaire to find out the solution to the problems. Researcher prepared a fifty copies of questionnaire and distributed to fifty foreign Postgraduate students from Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The respondents were given the questionnaires to answer questions. The questionnaire questions consisted of demographic information such as, gender, age, level of education and some questions regarding respondents' attitude towards collocations (section 1). Respondents were given questions to select the correct answer regarding collocation combinations (section 2). In this section, the researcher also asked the respondents to answer a question and write the meaning of eight English collocation patterns in Arabic language. (section 3). Respondents were asked the reasons regarding difficulties or problems that the foreign students face while using English collocations. In the second question, the respondents were asked to provide suggestions to solve the problems (section 4).

RESULTS

The results are presented and discussed by the researcher in this chapter in details after appropriate statistical analysis through the information collected from the questionnaire of the Foreign Postgraduate Students from Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The data was entered into sheets and the frequency of the respondents shows various opinions or results for each question in this research. The researcher collected answers from the respondents' questionnaire, related to gender, that may help students identifying the problem of misunderstanding English collocations, as well as find out appropriate solutions which may help them avoid committing collocation errors. The questions in the questionnaire were divided into four sections: Section one: Gender, age and level of education. **Questions regarding selecting the best lexical collocation patterns and grammatical collocation patterns by the respondents.**

Section two :Questions regarding selecting the best lexical collocation patterns and grammatical collocation patterns by the respondents. In section three, a question regarding understanding English collocational combinations by the respondents and questions regarding a filling-in blanks test regarding lexico-grammatical errors by the respondents of multiple choice. In section four, two questions were given to the respondents, the first question regarding writing difficulties and/or problems foreign students face while using English collocation. The second question regarding giving some suggestions to solve the problems.

CONCLUSION

The subject consisted of Libyans, Iraqis, and Afghanis foreign Postgraduate students who were randomly selected from SHIATS Deemed University, Allahabad where they are studying to obtain Master and/or PhD in the year 2014-2015.

The Answers of the respondents which were collected and analyzed are:

1- In section one of the questionnaires the researcher asked the respondents to give some demographic information of their own such as gender, age, level of their educational qualification. The researcher also asked the respondents to answer a question regarding teacher's motivation of learning collocations where the respondents asked to give correct answer to a number of five listed point scale frequencies, i.e. 1) never, 2) rarely, 3) sometimes, 4) often, 5) very often. Respondents were also asked to give their responses to a question regarding learning vocabulary which consists of four point scale, e.g.: (1) agree (2) disagree (3) partially agree (4) strongly disagree. Respondents were also given two pairs of yes/no questions besides one question regarding Respondents' experience (duration of learning English collocation), e.g.:

(1) 1- 5 years, (2) 6-10, (3) 11-15, (4) 16-20, (5) Above 20 years.

2- In section two, a test of fill-in the blanks was conducted by the researcher to test the collocation knowledge of the respondents by asking them a number of questions regarding types of collocations through lexical collocation and grammatical collocation.

1- Verb+Noun 2- Adjective+Noun 3- Noun+Noun 4- Preposition+Noun

5- Noun+Preposition. In section three, the respondents were tested to write the meaning of eight English collocation patterns in Arabic. In section four, the researcher asked the respondents to answer two questions; the first question was regarding writing the reasons behind difficulties or problems that face

foreign Postgraduate students while learning English collocations. In the second question the respondents were asked to give some suggestions to solve the problems. Collecting and analyzing respondents' answers from the questionnaire, the researcher found the following:

1-Students commit mistakes once they are faced by verb +noun collocation pattern. They change the form of Arabic verb of the expression "**commit a mistake**". They use gerund or a noun for the English verb "**commit**", for example: "**irtikab**" instead of "**yatakib**" which is the correct meaning of this verb in Arabic. The result showed that most of difficulties occur due to students' ignorance of the verb form of the present tense in English.

2-Regarding Noun+Noun collocation pattern question, foreign students found no difficulty to give the correct answer in their native language, for example, "**muhimma sa?ba**" was given for "**hard task**". It was easier for them than Verb+Noun English collocation pattern "**exert an effort**". They are confused and unable to differentiate between the English verb forms of present and/or past. Therefore, they misuse the form of the Arabic verb when they want to express the meaning of the verb "**exert**" in the English collocation pattern, "**exert an effort**" for example, "**badala**" in the past, whereas the correct form of Arabic language should be "**yabdul**" instead.

3-Regarding adjective + Noun collocation pattern, Arabic students find difficulty with an English combination such as "**sound sleep**". They change the meaning of the language, for example, "**yabduna? im**". A correct meaning of the English pattern "**sound sleep**" in Arabic language should be "**noumunamiq**". Foreign students should be aware and pay special attention when dealing with such combinations of collocation. Students commit serious mistakes of this kind for three reasons. Firstly, may be due to the fact that English and Arabic do not belong to the same family. Secondly, the English word "**sound**" is a multiple meaning word. Thirdly, the word "**sound**" is misused by foreign students and it was used to express the meaning of an English linking verb as a result.

4-Regarding the Noun+Noun pattern of collocation, such as "**association of ideas**", the researcher found great majority of the foreign Postgraduate students in the questionnaire committed major mistakes when they were asked to write the meaning of that English collocation into the meaning of their native language. The respondents' answer for that question was "**jam? atafkar**", whereas the correct and acceptable meaning should be "**tada? alafkar**". It seems that students fail to select the proper meaning for this pattern of collocation. This error occurred because of the students' Knowledge is merely limited to the basic meaning of the word.

5- Regarding the lexical collocation pattern Verb + Noun such as

"**pay a visit**" was incorrectly used by most of the foreign students. The result has shown that Verb +Noun construction pose challenge to Arabic students in understanding collocation of English as foreign language, i.e.: an incorrect construction of Arabic language "**ziyarat alajer**" is misused to express the meaning of "**pay a visit**", whereas an Arabic correct and acceptable meaning should be "**yazour/yakum biziyyarah**". Students are faced by this difficulty may be caused for two reasons, firstly, the poor background of using de-lexical verbs. Secondly, the lack and /or limited knowledge of collocation range of the English verb "**pay**" and thirdly, using the literal meaning of the verb "**pay**".

6-Regarding grammatical collocation Verb+ Noun, most of the foreign students misunderstood the meaning of English pattern "**long for**" when they were asked to put the equivalent meaning of their native language, for example:

"**Mundufatrah**." Here, the researcher emphasizes that students should be aware and more careful when dealing with this wrong and unacceptable pattern, furthermore, the meaning of that incorrect pattern is time of expression in Arabic language. Therefore, this pattern of collocation is problematic and hinders foreign students' learning may be due to three reasons. Firstly, using a literal meaning. Secondly, misusing of dictionary and thirdly, ignorance of multiple meaning of words. Based on the findings of this study it is suggested that:

- 1) Particular attention should be paid to the teaching of all types of collocations, especially grammatical collocations.
- 2) Teaching all types of collocations should start in the early stages of language learning.
- 3) Those collocations that do not have direct translational equivalence should be emphasized in practice and tasks.
- 4) Teachers should devise exercises that help students in the process of recognition and production of collocations.
- 5) Lexical collocations are easier to acquire than grammatical collocations.

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