

Analysis of collocations in the Iranian postgraduate students' writings

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ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged that collocations play an important role in second language learning, particularly at the intermediate and advanced levels. This study intended to explore the influence of first language (L1) and the cultural background of learners on the production of collocations. Thirty Iranian postgraduate students participated in this study and their academic writings were analyzed to determine the collocations they produced and to identify the basis for their difficulties in producing collocations. A focus group interview was used to determine the influence of L1 and cultural background of the learners on the production of collocations. The results showed that learners have difficulties with both lexical and grammatical collocations in their writing. First language influence appeared to have a strong effect on the learners' production of collocation. In addition, as language and culture are not separable, the cultural difference between the first language and target language caused students to come up with odd and unacceptable lexical collocations from the perspective of native speakers. The results indicated that learners are often not aware of the collocations and are not able to control their collocation production.

Keywords: collocations; culture; L1 influence; positive transfer; negative transfer

INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to investigate the influence of L1 and cultural background of EFL Iranian learners on the production of collocations. In addition, this study investigated learners' use of collocations

by analyzing the learners' written works. Collocations are two or more words which have a strong tendency to co-occur in a language as a prefabricated combination of two or more words in a particular context. (Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens 1968) They are one of the difficulties that second language learners, in particular, adult second language learners, have to deal with in the process of learning English. These difficulties depend on a variety of variables such as students' native language (L1) background, age, and personality.

Language teaching over the years has been based on the dichotomy of grammar and vocabulary: master the grammar system, learn lots of words and the speaker will be able to talk about any topic. This view of language has meant that students have learned an extensive vocabulary of predominantly nouns, and then struggled to use grammar to talk about those things. This is the reason for so many grammar mistakes (Lewis and Gough 1997). During any EFL course in Iran, great emphasis is on grammar not vocabulary and students and perhaps the teachers themselves are not aware of word combinations. Students learn the words in isolation and memorize the words individually by translating them to their mother tongue. It means they store new vocabulary words individually and not as a chunk. Therefore, when students want to produce collocations they fail to produce them correctly. People are using grammar to do what it was never meant to do. Grammar enables them to construct language when they are unable to find what they want ready-made in their mental lexicons. But so much of the language of the effective language user is already in prefabricated chunks, stored in their mental lexicons just waiting to be recalled for use. Among these combinations, there are words that "co-occur naturally with greater than random frequency" (Lewis and Gough 1997, p. 25) and with "mutual expectancy" (Zhang 1993, p. 1). Those words are well linked in a native speaker's memory and retrieved as a chunk (Aghba, 1990). For example *sour milk and rancid meat* are well-established collocations that are remembered in chunks and are used by native speakers as chunks (Oxford Collocations Dictionary 2009). However, *rotten milk* is not stored as a unit in a native speaker's memory and therefore, is not a collocation. ESL/EFL learners can concoct an awkward expression such as *rotten milk* when they have no memory or intuition of the correct or acceptable collocation that native speakers use. These chunks of lexis, which include collocations, do more than just name things, they also have a pragmatic element. They enable learners to talk about things - to 'do' things. This raises the status of collocation to much more than just words which go together.

The majority of Iranian EFL learners have some knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary; however, they seem to have serious problems with the use of collocations. For instance Iranian learners using the Persian language say "*baran-e- shadid*" which literally means "*hard rain*" and when it comes to English they think in their first language and instead of "*heavy rain*" they write or say "*hard rain*." This example is a semantic expansion, in which learners impose a corresponding word meaning into target-language word, reflecting influence from Persian *shadid* which means "hard" and "heavy". This inefficiency is most likely due to the lack of knowledge of word combinations among Iranian EFL students, and to a large extent, the inadequate emphasis given to the teaching of collocational patterns in their textbooks, and the type of instruction they receive. Producing collocations in writing poses particular difficulties. To enhance EFL learners' writing competence, English teachers have been making significant efforts, spending a great deal of time devoting themselves to correcting students' writing and attempting to identify the difficult areas in students' English compositions. Despite this effort, students continue producing unacceptable word combinations over and over. In fact, as Bahns and Eldaw (1993) state, it is usually the case that the majority of EFL learners have different problems in their oral and written production. According to Hill, "Students with good ideas often lose marks because they do not know the four or five most important collocations of a key word that is central to what they are writing about" (Hill 2000:5).

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Robins (1976), studies on collocations started 2,300 years ago in Greece. The Greek Stoics related collocations to semantics and used the concept of collocation to study the meaning relationships between words. According to these ancient scholars, words “do not exist in isolation, and they may differ according to the collocation in which they are used” (Robins 1967, p.21). The British linguist J. R. Firth, who is the father of collocational studies in modern times, is in the tradition of the Greek Stoics. Many of his statements about collocations are similar to the ancient Greek scholars; for example “words are mutually expectant and mutually comprehended” (Firth 1957, p.12) or “you shall know a word by the company it keeps” (p. 11). Although, it is widely accepted that Firth is the first linguist in modern times to explicitly introduce the notion of collocation into a theory of meaning, Mitchell (1971) believes that Firth in selecting the term for combination of words as collocation may have been influenced by Palmer’s monograph on collocations.

After Palmer’s work in the 1930s, second language teachers have looked at collocations both as an opportunity and a problem. There have been some factors in recent years, which helped collocations in particular and ‘formulaic language’ in general to come into focus for second language learners: The expansion of computerized texts and works of Sinclair (1987) showed the quick spread in the use of collocation. For Pawley and Syder (1983) multi-word ‘lexicalized’ phrases have the important role in producing fluent and idiomatic language; regular and odd chunks are at the heart of those usage-based models in both language description and first language acquisition (Tomasello 2003). Seesink (2007) investigated whether the teaching of vocabulary and collocations can help improve students’ writing and found that the attention to collocations had a positive impact on the students’ results. The respondents were Arab, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. An online program was used to teach the students collocation. She did not however clarify what type of collocations she used. In her study she did not show what types of collocations are difficult for the learners. Due to the huge number of collocations, it is not possible to teach students all types of collocations, therefore, those collocations which are more problematic to the students should be recognized and taught first (Lewis and Conzett 2000).

Smith’s (2005) declares including collocation in the curriculum is very important. The first reason is when non-native speakers encounter extensive difficulty in selecting the accurate combination of words, even in cases where the learner knows the individual words; collocations are still likely to be problematic. According to Lewis (1993) the second reason is the need for learners to go beyond the ‘intermediate plateau’ (p. 14). These students can cope in most situations, but they tend to ‘avoid’ or ‘talk around’ the more challenging tasks of advanced language learning. Collocation instruction is especially motivating for upper level students (Williams 2002). The third reason is that possessing knowledge of frequently occurring collocations increases vocabulary knowledge and improves fluency and helps achieve stress and intention (Williams 2002). The final reason is that collocation errors are more damaging to the communication process than most grammatical errors. The result is unnatural sounding expressions or odd or possibly out of date phrasing (Williams 2002).

While the need for research on collocations has been identified a long time ago, academic investigations have only been conducted recently (Aghbar and Tang 1991, Bahns and Eldaw 1993, Gitsaki 1999 and Seesink 2007). Statements on the degree of L1 influence on lexis in general are contradictory. On the one hand, it has been claimed that L1 influence is not very important in the area of lexis (Martin 1984), while on the other hand, lexis is among the levels of language most likely to be affected by transfer (Ellis 1996, p. 315). A study by Burgschmidt and Perkins (1985, in Nesselhauf, 2004) reported that advanced learners made frequent transfer. The same result was obtained by Baigent (1999), though in neither study is this influence quantified. With regard to individual types

of phraseological units, the findings are also contradictory. For collocations, a whole range of claims can be found. Some authors concluded on the basis of their studies that L1 influence is very weak. For example, Farghal and Obiedat (1995, p. 320) in their elicitation test and Lombard (1997) in her production study observed transfer in about 10% of the non-native-like collocations produced by advanced learners. Biskup (1992) observed a somewhat greater degree of L1 influence in a translation test on collocations, but also a considerable difference between groups with different L1s. She found 21% L1 influence on inappropriate collocations with German learners and 48% with Polish learners. In the studies conducted by Fargal and Obiedat (1995), Gitsaki (1999), Al-Zahrani (1998), and Ang, Hajar Abdul Rahim, Tan, Khazriyati Salehuddin (2011), learners' reliance on their first language (L1) was examined. The researchers found both positive and negative transferences, which influence the production of collocations. They found that collocations that had equivalents in the students' L1 were easier and thus were more likely to be elicited than the ones having no equivalents in the students' L1. Bahns et.al (1993) defines positive transfer in collocations as congruent collocations and those collocations that have no equivalents in students' L1 as non-congruent collocations.

Unfortunately, these studies do not provide enough information regarding the general proficiency level of the subjects or statistical information on the test instruments used. To some extent, it is difficult to know exactly how reliable their findings are because most of them have used a lexical approach and ignored the grammar aspect. In addition, none of these studies has investigated the influence of culture on the production of collocations. Language is a part of culture. Therefore, considering the cultural aspects of the first language strengthen the findings.

THE STUDY

This paper intends to investigate the influence of L1 and cultural background of Iranian postgraduate students at UKM on the production of collocations. In addition, this study investigated students' use of collocations by analyzing the students' written work. The next sections of this paper will explain the classification of collocations, research questions, methodology, result and discussion.

CLASSIFICATION OF COLLOCATIONS

This paper utilized the classification of collocations based on Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986) into two categories: Grammatical collocations and Lexical collocations. Following Benson et.al (1986), a grammatical collocation generally is a dominant open class word (noun, adjective or verb) and a preposition or particular structural pattern such as an infinitive or a clause. The major types of grammatical collocations are:

- Noun + Preposition/ to infinitive/ that clause (access to, agreement that...)
- Preposition + Noun (in advance, to somebody's advantage)
- Adjective + Preposition/ to infinitive/ that clause (aware of, necessary to, afraid that...)
- Verb + Preposition/ infinitive with to/ infinitive without to/ verb form ending in -ing/ that clause (Adjust to, begin to, keep doing, think that).

A lexical collocation, on the other hand, normally does not contain infinitive or clauses. It typically consists of open class words (Noun, Adjective, verb or adverb). According to syntactic characteristics, Lewis (2000, p. 51) classifies lexical collocations into six major types:

- Adjective + Noun (*strong tea, major problem, key issue*)
- Noun + Noun (*a pocket calculator, sense of pride*)
- Verb + Noun (*make an impression, set an alarm*)

- Verb + Adverb (*spell accurately, live dangerously, smiled proudly*)
- Adverb + Adjective (*strictly accurate, completely soaked, happily married*)
- Noun + Verb (*companies merged, pose a problem*).

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

The participants in this study are 30 Iranian male and female postgraduate students at UKM (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia). Their ages range from twenty four to thirty five. English language is their foreign language while their first language is Persian. Their English proficiency level is intermediate and above as it is compulsory for students to have a minimum IELTS of 5.5 to be able to enroll at the university. Those students who do not have IELTS are required to take a placement test and they are required to get a score of at least 80%. The university has an intensive English program to accommodate those who score less than 80% in the placement test. The Placement test consists of speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills. Students remain in this program until they managed to meet the university's admission requirement. The participants of this study have an IELTS or have passed the University placement exam.

INSTRUMENTS

The data collection instruments used in this study were a writing task and focus group interview. The quantitative analysis was subjected to SPSS (statistical Package for the Social Sciences) V19 analysis.

WRITING TASK

Students were asked to write two essays on these topics:

1. Write about an unforgettable experience you have had.
2. How did you spend your last Norouz holiday (Iranian New Year holiday)?

In order to make it easier for students to complete the writing task a number of things were considered in the selection of these topics. Writing about an unforgettable experience is a personal matter and therefore it is assumed to be motivating and thought-provoking. In addition, one of the important considerations in choosing the topic is the extent to which the topic induces learners to produce collocations as a result of their cultural background. Therefore, the topic related to friends, family, and culture are familiar to the students. They had 45 minutes to write the essays of not more than 250 words. The subjects' essays were used as data in order to analyze the production of lexical and grammatical collocations. The use of collocations was measured by the quantity, variety, and accuracy of collocations. Frequencies of occurrence of lexical and grammatical collocations were counted both in quantity and variety by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS software v17).

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

A focus group interview is a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population (Richardson & Rabiee 2001). There were seven postgraduate students who

participated in the interview. The students were selected for the group interview according to Krueger & Casey's (2000) suggestion. According to them, the number of participants in a group interview should be seven students, large enough to gain a variety of perspectives and small enough so as not to become disorganized or fragmented. A focus group interview was used to discuss the collocations produced by the subjects and to find out if these collocations are commonly used amongst Iranians. The interview took 3 hours and the interview was recorded. The recorded interview was then transcribed for qualitative data analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

There was a coding procedure after the data collection. All the materials were placed into folders with an identifying number on each. The writings were then separated by topics and the contents were analyzed in order to identify the collocations. The writings were separated by topic, the contents were analyzed and the collocations were identified. For extracting the collocations from the writings 'content analysis' was used for this paper. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. This method examines texts for the frequency of identified terms (collocations). To assure participants' anonymity, numbers were used for every subject, instead of identifying the subjects by their name. For analyzing the interview data this study used 'framework analysis' by Krueger's (1994), which involved five steps. The steps are: 1. familiarization; 2. identifying a thematic framework; 3. indexing; 4. charting; and 5. mapping and interpretation. The first step refers to the process during which the researcher familiarized himself with the transcripts of the data collected. At this stage, the researcher used the field notes taken to identify themes i.e., the thematic framework, based on the key issues, concepts and themes expressed by the participants. The next stage is indexing which involved identifying sections of the data that correspond to a particular theme. Charting involved arranging the indexed data based on charts of the themes. This means that the data were taken from its original textual context and arranged in charts that consist of headings and subheadings. The final stage of analysis involved analyzing the key characteristics as arranged in the charts.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the frequency of use for both grammatical and lexical collocation produced by the subjects in their writings. The participants produced 173 lexical and grammatical collocations in total. They produced 58 grammatical collocations which included 38 Verb+Preposition, 13 Preposition+Noun, and 7 Adjective+Preposition collocations., They produced 115 lexical collocations which included 76 Verb+Noun, 26 Adjective+Noun, 9 Noun+Noun, and 1 Verb+Adverb collocations.

TABLE 1. Frequency of use in the writing samples

| Type of Collocation | Subtypes | Frequency | Percent | Total |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------|---------|-------|
| Grammatical | Verb + Preposition | 38 | 65.5 | 58 |
| | Preposition + Noun | 13 | 22.4 | |
| | Adjective + preposition | 7 | 12.1 | |

| | | | | |
|---------|------------------|----|------|-----|
| Lexical | Verb + Noun | 76 | 66.1 | 115 |
| | Adjective + Noun | 26 | 22.6 | |
| | Noun + Noun | 9 | 7.8 | |
| | Verb + Adverb | 1 | .9 | |
| | Verb + Adjective | 2 | 1.7 | |
| | Noun + Adjective | 1 | .9 | |

POSITIVE TRANSFER

In the participants' writing tasks it was seen that when collocations had equivalents in Persian, it was easy for students to produce them. The following items are among the positively-transferred items:

TABLE 2. Positive transfer collocations

| No. | English Collocations | Persian Equivalents | Persian |
|-----|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1 | album comes out | Albom biroon amadan | بیرون آمدن آلبوم |
| 2 | breaks promise | Ahd shekastan | عهد شکستن |
| 3 | do homework | Taklif anjam dadan | تکلیف انجام دادن |
| 4 | blank tape | Film/navar khali | نوار فیلم خالی |
| 5 | golden opportunities | Forsat-e talaei | فرصت طلایی |
| 6 | preference to | Tarjih dadan be | ترجیح دادن به |
| 7 | success in | Movaffaghiyat dar | موفقیت در |

NEGATIVE TRANSFER

Based on the results, negative transfer is a common phenomenon among second language learners. The following items are among the negative-transferred items (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Negative transfer collocations

| No. | Collocations by students | Standard English collocations |
|-----|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Hard rain | Heavy rain |
| 2 | Do mistake | Make mistake |
| 3 | Give message | Leave message |
| 4 | Darken hair | Dye hair |
| 5 | Watchful neighbor | Quiet/ nice/friendly neighbor |
| 6 | Accused to | Accused of |
| 7 | Rely to | Rely on |
| 8 | Angry of | Angry with/at |
| 9 | Do suicide | Commit suicide |
| 10 | Difficult illness | Serious illness |
| 11 | Thick tea | Strong tea |
| 12 | Tall mountain | High mountain |

DISCUSSION

The following conclusions can be drawn from Table 1:

- a) Lexical collocations are easier for learners to acquire than grammatical collocations. The total number of grammatical collocations is 58 whereas the total number for lexical collocations is 115.
- b) The performance of the subjects on different subtypes of lexical collocation is significantly different. Among the different subtypes of lexical collocation, *verb + noun* appear to be the easiest for learners to acquire in comparison with other types of lexical collocations. For example *verb+Noun* collocations such as *break promise* and *do homework*.
- c) The subjects' performance on the three subtypes of grammatical collocation is significantly different. In grammatical collocation, *verb + preposition* appeared easier for the subjects than *noun+preposition* and *adjective+ preposition*.

During second language learning, two practical restrictions not present in L1 acquisition determine that there is a significant difference between L1 and L2 lexical development processes. The first restriction is the poverty of input in connection with both quantity and quality. Generally, second language learners often lack sufficient, highly contextualized input in the target language. As a result, this makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for an L2 learner to extract and create semantic, syntactic, and morphological specifications about a word and integrate such information into the lexical entry of that word. EFL learners usually focus on the individual words and neglect other important information, that is to say, what these individual words co-occurred with. They learn collocations as separate words rather than in chunks. As a result, when they want to produce collocation, they refer to their first language to find a suitable word for producing collocation in the target language. When that happens the consequences are under the influence of L1 on L2. This phenomenon is referred to by linguists as *transfer*. Transfer can be positive or negative. Positive transfer occurs when the patterns of L1 and L2 are the same. Negative transfer occurs when the patterns of students' L1 and L2 are different, in which case problems may arise (Fargal and Obiedat (1995), Gitsaki (1996), and Al-Zahrani (1998).

Table 2 shows that students did not have any problems with those collocations that have equivalents in the Persian language and it helped them to produce these collocations easily. For example collocations like *blank tape*, *golden opportunities*, and *preference to* have exact equivalents in Persian language.

In Table 3 the data shows that students had problems with collocations that had no equivalents in Persian. As a result, when students did not know a certain collocation, they relied on their first language and negatively transferred collocations from their L1. The collocation *heavy rain*, for instance, was one of the problematic collocations. In addition to the fact that such a collocation does not have a Persian equivalent and thus cause difficulty to students. As such, having difficulty with *heavy rain* may be explained by either the nature of the collocation or negative transfer factors. One of the interviewee said:

“For heavy, I say I am heavy. We use heavy for weight. We do not say the rain is heavy. I say hard rain. Do you know why? Because I am talking in English now. I am not very good in English. I want to say heavy rain, I do not know heavy, the first word comes in my mind I use it and I say hard rain.”

Another example is *leave message* where one of the students instead of *leave message* has used *give message*. In Persian *leave* means go away from or leave something behind. It has a negative meaning and it is different from English. So, everybody uses the verb ‘give’ and not ‘leave’. Another

interviewee said: *most of Persian compound verbs consist of 3 verbs: give, do, and take. That's why when we produce compound verbs usually we use one of these verbs with them.*

Tables 4, 5 and 6 show that verbs *kardan* (to do), *dadan* (to give), and *gereftan* (to take) are the three main verbs which are mostly used in collocations and compound verbs in Persian language. On the other hand, in English, there are so many verbs that are involved in making and constructing the collocations. These three verbs (*kardan*, *dadan* and *gereftan*) are the most commonly used verbs in Persian because apart from their direct meaning, they are used in thousands of different expressions and compound verbs as an auxiliary verb. One of the unique characteristics of the Persian verbal system is its predominant use of compound verbs to express verbal notions. Unlike English, that has over 5000 simple verbs, Persian has less than 200 (Dabir-Moghaddam, 1997). All other verbal notions are expressed through complex expressions. Therefore, when Iranian learners try to produce collocations they follow the compound verbs in Persian and by relying on them produce the collocations. In table 6, the first item *is take a shower*, take means '*gereftan*' in Persian. As it shows *gereftan* collocates with *doosh* (shower) in Persian. Therefore, this collocation has an equivalent in Persian language and the learners do not face any problem to produce it in their writing. The following tables, adapted from Dabir-Moghaddam (1997), show the common compound verbs in Persian and how these three verbs collocate with other words in Persian language.

TABLE 4. Kardan = to do

| English | + | collocates | Persian | + | collocates |
|----------|---|---------------|-------------|---|------------------|
| Paint | | apply, put on | Kardan (do) | | rang Paint |
| Mistake | | make | Kardan | | eshtebah Mistake |
| Save | | make | Kardan | | pasandaz save |
| Shower | | take | Kardan | | hamam Shower |
| Accident | | have | Kardan | | tasadof accident |

TABLE 5. Dadan = to give

| English | + | collocates | Persian | + | collocates |
|---------|---|----------------|---------|---|------------|
| Hand | | shake | Dadan | | dast |
| Promise | | make | Dadan | | ghol |
| Listen | | to | Dadan | | goosh |
| Request | | make | Dadan | | darkhast |
| Exam | | take | Dadan | | emtehan |
| Divorce | | get, apply for | Dadan | | talagh |

TABLE 6. Gereftan = to take

| English | + | collocates | Persian | + | collocates |
|-------------|---|-------------|-----------------|---|------------|
| Shower | | take | gereftan (take) | | doosh |
| Decision | | make | gereftan | | tasmim |
| Diet | | have, go on | gereftan | | regim |
| Celebration | | hold, have | gereftan | | jashn |
| Divorce | | get | gereftan | | talagh |

Since culture consists of people's historical and cultural background, it is considered as the symbolic representation of people and also as their way of living and thinking and their approach to life. Learners construct new knowledge by using their previous knowledge that they have acquired. Their previous knowledge comes from past experience, culture and environment (Jiang, 2000). In other words, learning is social and it happens within a culture. Learners make new meaning by relying on the previous knowledge. Such action depends on the mental construction which takes place in the mind. As learning is a social activity, learners' knowledge and their learning are associated with their connection with other human beings, their teachers, their peers, their family and in general with society. Every language form we use has meanings, and carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language (Jiang, 2000). People of different cultures can refer to different things while using the same language forms. For example, the word *dog* in English, and the word *sag* (dog) in Persian, refer to the same kind of animal. However, most English people associate *dog* with man's best friend, a good companion, kept as a pet, together with many commendatory idioms, such as *lucky dog*. Most Iranian people, by contrast, associate *sag* (dog) with watchdogs, defending the household from thieves and not a clean animal.

According to Cowie (1998), "cultural background refers to information that is most difficult to formalize, as it is connected with semantics in a very indirect and still unexplored way. We say that a word or a word-combination has 'cultural background' when it possesses a clearly discernible ideological aura associated with a historical situation, a political movement, a fashionable trend, and so on" (p. 61). Therefore, when an Iranian learner produces a collocation such as *darken hair* (dye hair), cultural background can be discerned in such lexical collocation. The collocation *dye hair* in English has an equivalent in Persian, but Iranian learners usually say *darken hair* instead of *dye hair*. Considering the learners' culture, an explanation is that the use of the verb *darkening* is a result of cultural interference because people usually do not see the women's hair as the women in Iran wear *hijab*, and hence, only the males' hair is seen. In Iran only men dye their hair black. It is clear that this particular subject relied on his background knowledge and produced this collocation. However, cultural patterns differ from one language to another language and from culture to culture. For example, *bread* collocates with *cheese* in Persian, but *bread* collocates with *butter* in English. Both the English and the Iranians value their neighbors' goodness and friendliness. However, the English prefer quiet neighbors, whereas Iranians are happy to have watchful neighbors. Watchful neighbors are people who help us and take care and watch our house when we are not around. This may indicate that Iranians have a much closer relationship with their neighbors than do the English. So, differences in collocational patterning in different languages reflect the preferences of specific language communities for certain modes of expression. Some collocations are a direct reflection of the material, social, or moral environment in which they occur.

Therefore, as L2 and EFL learners' culture is different from the culture of the target language, it causes the learners to produce collocations which sound peculiar and unacceptable to the native speaker of English but cannot be considered as a wrong collocation because the collocation produced by the ESL and EFL learners are influenced by the learners' cultural background.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study investigated the influence of L1 and cultural background of the EFL learners on the production of collocations. In addition, this study investigated the EFL learners' use of collocations by analyzing the learners' written work. This study illustrated that when there is a confluence between the English collocations and Persian equivalents, the students produced the correct collocations (blank

tape/ (صلاح راون) but in an opposite manner when there is a deviation between the collocations in the two languages, students faced difficulty with the items and they produced collocations such as *do a mistake* instead of *make a mistake*. Therefore, this study showed that culture and background of the subjects influence the production of collocations.

Based on the findings it is recommended that considering difficulty of the production in collocations, learners are in need of more practice producing collocations. In addition, they should receive as much collocation input as possible. For example, a focus on the inclusion of selected lexical and grammatical collocations in reading comprehension passages allows the teacher to provide the students with a contextual opportunity for exploring and acquiring collocations. A follow up to this instruction is asking the student to use some of these collocations while responding to a writing exercise topically chosen to elicit some of the elected collocations. Non-congruent collocations should receive more attention in language teaching without neglecting congruent collocations as some researchers suggested (Bahns et.al 1993).

Collocations are very important in writing and using them properly enhances the writing skill. Acquisition of specialized collocations will enable learners to communicate in a professionally acceptable way. In addition, when time is limited to formulate a message and get it across in writing, writers would feel a more pressing need to use prefabricated expressions to save processing time and energy. Including collocations in curriculum and preparing the students to use collocations effectively and appropriately in writing will contribute to efficient communication. Particularly, with adult ESL/EFL learners, who are uncomfortable about their limited structural and lexical knowledge, the teaching of collocations can have additional advantages. This is because collocations can decrease their affective filter by providing them with ready-made chunks and prepackaged building blocks so that their worry about structure and lack of words can be reduced.

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