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Collocation a neglected aspect in teaching and learning EFL
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Abstract

During the past three decades, the need for emphasis on collocations has received increasingly attention in the field of EFL teaching learning processes. Several researchers pointed out the benefits of learning collocations such as increasing learners' language competence, enhancing learners' communicative competence, and being toward native-like. So the aim of present study is to focus on investigating collocational error types made by the participants, in EFL learning. The issues for teachers during teaching collocations, the frequency of collocational errors, and the sources of collocational errors. The participants' perceptions of difficulty in collocations were also examined. Moreover, it attempts to find answers for these questions. What are instruction effects on learners' collocational competence? Which collocations need to be learned? ) How should we teach collocations in the classroom? Hence, collocational knowledge is essential for EFL learners and collocation instruction in EFL courses is required for every teacher or student who is dealing with English.

1. Introduction

As far as the term "collocation" is concerned, previous studies seem to fall into two broad categories. Most researchers defined collocations from the aspect of partnership or co-occurrence of words. Halliday and Hasan (1976) classified collocations from the aspect of discourse. In the present study, the definition of collocations focuses on co-occurrence of words, and the classification of collocations is based on the categories of collocations proposed by Benson et al (1986b). Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986b) gave the definition of collocations in general: "In English, as in other languages, there are many fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Such groups of words are called recurrent combinations, fixed combinations, or collocations "(p. ix). They also classified English collocations into two major groups: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. Lexical collocations are further divided into seven types, whereas grammatical collocations are divided into eight. Lexical collocations contain nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Lexical collocations may be verb+ noun, adjective+ noun, noun+ verb, adverb+ adjective and verb+ adverb. On the other hand, grammatical collocations are phrases containing a dominant word, such as a noun, an adjective, or a verb and a preposition or grammatical structure like an infinitive or clause.

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Howarth (1998) applied criteria such as restricted collocability, semantic specialization and idiomaticity to classifying collocations and idioms into four groups: free combinations (free collocations), restricted collocations, figurative idioms, and pure idioms. The significance of composites is "their degree of restrictedness related to mental storage and processing" (p. 28).

1.1 Sources of Collocational Errors

According to different studies the main sources of collocational errors are as follow:

1. Overgeneralization: Learners used overgeneralization when the item did not carry any obvious contrast to them. In other words, Overgeneralization is the creation of a deviant structure in place of two regular structures on the basis of students' experience of the target language. For example, the students would use the collocation *I am worry about instead of I am worried about.

2. Ignorance of rule restrictions: Errors of ignorance of rule restrictions were the result of analogy and failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures (Richards, 1973). For instance, *ask you a favor is a false analogy of the construction of verb+ object+ object.

3. False concepts hypothesized: False concepts hypothesized errors result from learners' faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language. Such as *do something breakthrough instead of achieve a breakthrough, *made me grown up mind instead of cultivate my mind, *take more respect instead of pay more respect, and *have a great grade instead of get a great grade.

4. The use of synonym: The use of a synonym for a lexical item in a collocation is seen as a "straightforward application of the open choice principle" (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995). Students might use *broaden your eyesight instead of broaden your vision.

5. Interlingual transfer: learners' first language influenced their production on collocations and was the common source of errors. For instance, *listen some classical music, *compliment my pictures, and *arrive school are understandable in Chinese.

6. Word coinage: Word coinage means that students make up a new word to communicate the desired concept. The examples was *see sun-up instead of see the sunrise.

7. Approximation: Approximation means that learners use an incorrect vocabulary item or structure, which "shares enough semantic features in common with the desire item to satisfy the speaker" (Tarone, 1981, as cited in Liu, 1999b, p. 491). For instance, the word middle in *middle exam was used to mean mid-term in midterm exam.

With regard to one of sources of making collocational error-the shortage of learners' collocational competence, Howarth (1998) compared the writing corpora of EFL learners and native English speakers. He reported that both learners have insufficient knowledge of collocations in general. When compared with native English speakers, EFL learners made a lower percentage of conventional collocations but a higher percentage of deviant combinations (e.g. perform a project, write a table, pay effort, and reach finding). Other researchers such as Bahns and Eldaw (1993) and Farghal and Obiedat (1995) also found that L2 learners had a big gap between their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. EFL students make collocational errors in their writing because of the interference of their mother tongue, lack of the collocational concept, the interlingual or intra lingual transfer, paraphrase and their shortage of their collocational knowledge. These can be the possible reasons for explaining why EFL students frequently make unacceptable collocations in their writing.
To conclude, EFL students make collocational errors in their writing and speaking because of the interference of their mother tongue, lack of the collocational concept, the interlingual or intra-lingual transfer, paraphrase and their shortage of their collocational knowledge. These can be the possible reasons for explaining why EFL students frequently make unacceptable collocations in their writing and speaking.

1.2. Collocations in Teaching Learning EFL

Brown (1974) was one of the first few pioneers to propose the incorporation of collocations in the EFL classroom. She underscored that learning collocations not only increases EFL learners' knowledge of collocation but also improves learners' oral fluency, listening comprehension, and reading speed. Additionally, Brown pointed out that learning collocation enables learners gradually to realize language chunks used by native speakers in speech and writing and to get the feel of using words in natural combination with other words as well.

Nattinger (1980) affirmed that "language production consists of piecing together the ready-made units appropriate for particular situations, and that comprehension relies on knowing which of these patterns to predict in these situations" (p.341). Nattinger (1988) claimed that collocations can aid learners in committing these words to memory and defining the semantic area of a word, and can permit learners to know and to predict what kinds of words would be found together. Moreover, he gave the reasons of teaching lexical phrases. The most important reason was that teaching lexical phrases (collocations with pragmatic functions) will lead to fluency in speaking and writing because they shift learners' concentration from individual words to larger structures of the discourse and to the social aspects of the interaction.

In the lexical approach, Lewis (1993, p. 35) pointed out his methodological implications to teach collocation

1) Early emphasis on receptive skills, especially listening, is important.
2) De-contextualized vocabulary learning is a fully legitimate strategy.
3) The role of grammar as a receptive skill must be recognized.
4) The importance of contrast in language awareness must be recognized.
5) Teachers should employ extensive, comprehensive language for receptive purposes.
6) Extensive writing should be held as long as possible.
7) Nonlinear recording formats, such as collocation tables, word trees, are central to the lexical approach.
8) Teachers' reformulation should be the natural response to student error.
9) Teachers should always react primarily to the content of student language.
10) Pedagogical chunking should be a frequent classroom activity.

2. Conclusion

From the studies reviewed above, we can see that findings were quite consistent. It has been shown that EFL College students (English majors and non-English majors), high school students, and professors lack collocational knowledge. The major reason why EFL learners generally lack collocational knowledge is that collocation has been neglected in EFL classrooms and thus, learners tend to ignore learning collocations. Hence, those researchers all stated that collocations, the most needed and useful genre of prefabricated speech should be highlighted in EFL classrooms. Teachers should present collocations with every new word and incorporate collocations which are linguistically and culturally distinct from learners' L1 in their teaching syllabi, and encourage EFL students to use English dictionaries emphasizing on collocations, such as the BBI Combinatory dictionary and The Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English.

References


