

THE USAGE OF COLLOCATIONS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Annotation: A collocation can consist of two or more words that commonly occur together, such as a verb and a noun, an adjective and a noun, or an adverb and an adjective. This article explores the significance of collocations in teaching English to university students. It discusses the definition and types of collocations, their role in language acquisition, and effective pedagogical strategies for integrating collocations into the curriculum. By emphasizing the importance of collocational knowledge, the article aims to enhance students' fluency and comprehension in English.

Keywords: Collocations, English language teaching, university students, language acquisition, pedagogy, fluency, vocabulary.

Introduction

Collocations help learners seem more natural and fluent, which makes them crucial for acquiring English competence. Language use might feel clunky or unnatural when students cobble phrases together without knowing collocations or rely solely on word-for-word translation. With a greater focus on communicative ability rather than just grammatical precision, the teaching of English as a second language has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Collocations are word combinations that regularly occur together in everyday language use, and mastering them is essential to becoming fluent in English [1].

Word combinations that regularly occur together in a predictable and natural way are known as collocations. For example, native English speakers frequently use phrases like "make a decision," "strong coffee," or "take a break," without really considering why these particular word combinations sound right [2]. Because they adhere to English-specific patterns, these combinations are frequently impossible to translate directly from one language to another. For English language learners to become fluent and sound natural, they must comprehend and use these word partnerships.

Additionally, learning collocations improves one's receptive (reading and listening) and productive (speaking and writing) abilities. Students who comprehend collocations are better able to understand texts or discussions that contain these frequent word pairs. Additionally, it improves their capacity for clear and fluid idea expression in their own conversation. These factors make emphasising collocations an essential component of any all-encompassing language-learning program.

Methodology

Collocations were traditionally disregarded as a part of vocabulary study because language studies has historically placed a strong emphasis on grammatical structures—"mastery of the grammatical system is a prerequisite for effective communication" [3]. It is evident, according to Sinclair [4], that words do not simply show up in texts at random and that people cannot create meaningful sentences using only grammatical rules.

The term "collocations" in its contemporary linguistic sense was initially used by Palmer (1933). "Succession of two or more words that may best be learnt as if it were single words" is how he characterised collocations [5]. The limitations on the way words can be used together, such as which nouns go with specific verbs or which prepositions and verbs are used together, are also known as collocations [6]. "Although collocations can be classified in any different ways, the most common classification is the one into grammatical and lexical collocations" [7].

According to British linguists, primarily Halliday and Sinclair, grammatical description does not explain all of the patterns in a language, therefore lexical theory is necessary to supplement grammatical theory. The communicative and natural approaches shifted the focus of language studies in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1990s saw a rise in interest. The emphasis on vocabulary growth led to more engaging vocabulary instruction because mastering such rich tasks is necessary to assist students in acquiring, practicing, and improving their knowledge of the language's lexical components. According to Chung (2018), engaging vocabulary exercises can foster a desire to learn.

Lewis (1997) suggests the following collocational categories [3]:

- 1. Strong.** A large number of collocations are strong or very strong, and they are combinations that frequently occur together, for example we talk mostly about rancid butter, but other things can be described as rancid as well such as rancid breath.
- 2. Weak.** These are words which co-occur with a greater than random frequency, or combined with a lot of different words, for example many things can be long (long coastline or long friendship) or short (short vacation or short memory), good (good news or good time) or bad (bad fish or a bad cough), cheap (cheap tickets or feeling cheap) or expensive (an expensive hobby or expensive shops). However some things are more predictable than others which than could be called collocations such as, white wine or red wine, etc.
- 3. Medium strength.** These are words that go together with a greater frequency than weak collocations but not as limited in combinability as strong collocations such as hold a meeting, carry out a study, make a mistake.

Hill (1999) states that: Unique collocations, denotes word combination which is not usually found in combination with any other word for example with the word foot when used as a verb in the collocation foot the bill, since we cannot say for example foot the invoice etc. Similarly, we shrug the shoulders, but we do not shrug anything else [8]. As Hill (1999) argued that: "Collocation is the key to fluency."

Results

Collocations are word pairings that frequently occur together in regular language usage. These word combinations or groupings have a strong propensity to occur together because of idiom, convention, or custom. Collocations combine several speech elements, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, to improve the naturalness and fluency of language. Collocations are defined as pairs or groups of words that are commonly used together in a way that sounds natural to native speakers. They can be categorized into several types:

- Adjective + Noun: e.g., "strong coffee," "heavy rain."

These combinations are essential for learners to recognize as they often appear in everyday communication and texts.

- Noun + Verb: e.g., "the dog barks," "the engine failed."
- Verb + Noun: e.g., "make a decision," "take a break."

These pairings sound correct to native speakers because they are frequently used together, while alternative combinations, such as "do a decision" or "make homework," would sound unnatural.

- Adverb + Adjective: e.g., "deeply concerned," "highly unlikely."

These combinations give more nuance to sentences and are vital for expressing degrees of certainty or emotion.

- Verb + Adverb: e.g., "speak fluently," "run quickly."
- Noun + Noun: "a surge of interest," "a sense of accomplishment," or "a series of events."

These pairs are often more complex but are still crucial for students to master as they progress in their language learning.

These collocation types serve as building blocks for natural language use. When students recognize these patterns, they gain confidence in both understanding and producing English, allowing them to communicate with greater ease and fluency. Understanding these combinations helps learners construct sentences that sound more natural and fluent.

According to Benson, Benson & Ilson (1986) grammatical collocations fall into several different types. Some of the most common types are:

- 1) adverb+adjective collocations: Absolutely terrified, Deeply concerned
- 2) adjective+noun collocations: Native speaker, Heavy rain
- 3) noun+noun collocations: Comfort zone, Credit card
- 4) noun+verb collocations: Thunder rumbled, Rumors spread
- 5) verb+noun collocations: Commit a crime, Make mistakes
- 6) verb+preposition collocations: Agree with, Participate in

7) adverb+adverb collocation: All alone, Right now

8) adverb+verb collocations: Strongly agree, Completely forgot

Incorporating collocations into English language instruction requires careful planning and execution. Teachers can use a range of tools to teach collocations, such as word maps, graphic organisers, and contextual learning activities. Word maps organise collocations into semantic zones to visually express them, which aids in comprehension and memory. When students utilise visual organisers such as concept maps and semantic webs to visualise the relationships between words and their collocates, their comprehension and memory increase.

When collocations are used in language training, language learners benefit greatly. Students' language abilities are expanded, their ability to communicate clearly and naturally is enhanced, and they are encouraged to learn new words. By stressing collocations, teachers can increase their students' awareness of lexical nuances and complexities and help them gain a better understanding of how to use English.

Collocation training can be included into the curriculum in a number of ways, such as through language games, role-playing activities, and vocabulary exercises. Teachers can assist students in identifying, utilising, and internalising collocations in authentic communication scenarios by creating contextualised learning activities. Collocations are better understood and applied when students encounter them in context, which is another benefit of using them in reading and writing projects.

Collocations are essential for enhancing spoken English fluency and naturalness. Teachers might incorporate frequently used word pairings into activities that encourage spontaneous communication in order to motivate students to employ collocations during speaking assignments. Role-playing exercises that require students to adopt particular roles and participate in conversations that inevitably use collocations are one useful strategy. For instance, collocations like "make a reservation," "take a flight," or "give advice" might be used in a role-playing situation involving trip planning.

Discussion

Collocations can be efficiently taught to English language learners using a variety of methods. For example, reading and listening activities that expose students to real language might help them understand how collocations are employed in context. Other helpful strategies include giving clear instruction on collocations, practicing using gap-fill games or activities, and using dictionaries or internet resources. Collocations help pupils learn more effectively and gain confidence in their ability to use the language in everyday situations.

Teachers should introduce collocations explicitly through examples and practice exercises. This could include:

- Presenting lists of common collocations.
- Engaging students in identifying collocations within texts.
- Creating fill-in-the-blank exercises where students must choose the correct collocation.

Integrating collocations into context-rich activities helps students understand their usage. For instance:

- Using authentic materials (e.g., articles, podcasts) that naturally incorporate collocations.
- Encouraging students to write sentences or short paragraphs using specific collocations.

Group work can facilitate peer learning and increase engagement. Activities could include:

- Pairing students to create dialogues using targeted collocations.
- Organizing group discussions where students must use specific collocations relevant to the topic.

Introducing pupils to real-world language is one of the best ways to teach collocations. Real-world sources like books, articles, podcasts, and even TV series provide rich illustrations of collocation usage in ordinary, organic circumstances. Students can internalise language usage patterns by absorbing certain word combinations through regular exposure. Schmitt's (2000) research highlights the value of a wide range of input in language learning, emphasising that learners gain by being exposed to collocations frequently in a variety of circumstances.

Students start to observe patterns in word pairing when they read texts or hear conversations where collocations are used frequently. Readers of novels, for instance, would encounter expressions like "take a risk," "make a suggestion," or "heavy traffic," whereas those who listen to podcasts might encounter collocations like "deeply concerned" or "highly successful." Students learn how to use these word combinations and are better equipped to use them in their own language output as a result of seeing and hearing them frequently.

By choosing reading and audio resources that are abundant in collocations, educators can promote this exposure. Giving students assignments that focus on these collocations—like underlining or writing down frequent word pairings—can improve their learning even more. Drawing learners' attention to collocations during the input stage is essential for retention, as noted by Nation (2001).

Collocation dictionaries and internet resources are useful tools for teaching collocations, in addition to exposure to real language. Collocation dictionaries give students common word pairings to assist them understand how to utilise vocabulary in context, in contrast to typical dictionaries that concentrate on individual word meanings. Students can more easily understand how words organically join by using resources like the Oxford Collocations Dictionary and the Longman Collocations Dictionary, which include lists of commonly used collocations and their definitions.

For students, collocation dictionaries are very helpful while finishing writing assignments or getting ready for speaking activities. Students can use these dictionaries to choose the best collocation rather than speculating about word pairings. When a student is uncertain about whether to use "strong" or "heavy" with the word "rain," for instance, they can immediately consult a collocation dictionary to be sure the right match is "heavy rain."

When teaching collocations, context is essential because it enables students to understand how word pairings work in meaningful conversation. Learners may find it difficult to comprehend collocations' practical applications if they are taught in isolation. Students can, however, understand the subtleties of collocation usage and how they add to a sentence or passage's overall meaning when they are presented in context.

Collocations can also be effectively taught through awareness-raising exercises. Through these exercises, students improve their ability to recognise and retain collocations and utilise them appropriately.

One such challenge is the gap-fill exercise, where students are given sentences that lack collocates and must choose the right word to complete the collocation. It is possible to present the statement "She made a decision" to students and ask them to choose between the terms "big," "strong," and "serious." These exercises reinforce the correct word pairings while providing students with low-stakes practice.

Collocations can also be taught with the aid of matching exercises. Students are given two lists for these exercises: one with basic words (such "make," "take," and "do") and another with collocates (like "a decision," "a risk," and "homework"). Students must match the basic words with the appropriate collocates. Their capacity to identify typical word pairings is improved by this exercise. and helps them commit these collocations to memory.

Speaking exercises such as "collocation chains" might also help kids. In this game, students take turns adding to a chain of collocations, making sure that the word pairings they choose are appropriate. For instance, one student might say, "take a break," to which another might reply, "break the news," followed by "news report." By motivating students to think rapidly and retain the appropriate collocations, this improves their ability to use them in real-time communication. Students have yet another great opportunity to practise collocations through writing tasks. To help students integrate collocations into their written work, teachers may provide guided writing assignments that demand that students use certain collocations in their writing.

Another useful practice is the collocation-based sentence construction challenge, which encourages students to put a collection of collocations together to form coherent phrases. For example, using the collocation "take a risk," students would be directed to construct the following sentence: "He decided to take a risk by starting his own business." This type of practice helps students become more accustomed to using collocations in written contexts by reinforcing their usage and sentence structure. For example, students can be required to write a brief narrative or essay that incorporates target collocations like "make an effort," "reach a conclusion," or "heavy workload." With the aid of these activities, students can concentrate on employing collocations correctly in their writing.

In order to improve students' receptive and productive understanding of collocations, it is also critical to involve them in a range of collocational activities. Collocations can be introduced through gap-filling exercises using words from a list or box on the receptive front. The following example from McCarthy et al. (2010) improves collocation receptive knowledge.

The meal that is least likely to accompany the preparation should be crossed out.

a. smoked cheese/turkey/bread/meat

b. fried noodles/yogurt/chicken/potatoes

Other games and activities include guessing games, memory games, quizzes, and more. Teachers can create their own activities or select those that best fit their educational circumstances. Repetition is crucial when teaching collocations since it helps students remember them. Collocations that are active and suitable for the demands of the students—such as those in computer science, law, or engineering—should also be taught. Learning collocations that are pertinent to their topic of study will pique learners' interest and motivation more than learning broad or related collocations. In 2015, El-Dakhs asserts that "it is not advisable to teach collocations that learners will rarely encounter in natural English."

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of collocations into English language teaching for university students is vital for developing their fluency and communicative competence. By understanding the nature and function of collocations, educators can design effective instructional strategies that enhance vocabulary acquisition and improve overall language proficiency. Students will communicate more effectively and feel more confident in their language abilities as they get better at using collocations. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of collocations in English instruction. Teachers enable students to speak English smoothly and confidently by giving them the information and abilities they need to identify and employ collocations. Students can get a sophisticated understanding of collocations and use them effectively in written and spoken language with focused education and meaningful practice.

It demonstrates that, in addition to grammatical knowledge, there are other crucial components of language proficiency that support speech accuracy and fluency. Most language classes can include collocation exercises, and when deciding what to emphasise, it's critical to take the needs, proficiency, and motivation of the students into account. Researchers and language teachers should pay particular attention to collocational skills in an EFL setting.

In summary, prioritizing collocation instruction within the English curriculum can lead to significant improvements in students' language performance, preparing them for real-world communication in an increasingly globalized environment.

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