



University Level Kurdish EFL Student's Ability to Use Collocations in University of Raparin

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to look into the primary sources in order to learn more about the students' abilities to using collocations at Raparin University's English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study included 60 Kurdish students studying EFL at Raparin University in Northern Iraq to determine their capacity to use collocations. The TRUE/FALSE and AGREE/DISAGREE tests were used to collect quantitative data on the individuals' major sources of collocational ability. The findings indicated that the students' understanding of English collocations is quite poor. It's safe to assume that the students were uninformed of the existence of collocations. Finally, the consequences of these findings on the use of collocations are examined. In addition, recommendations were offered for how academics and materials designers may improve language teaching materials for collocations by taking into account significant elements that frequently cause collocation difficulties.

Keywords: Collocations, Mother Tongue, Foreign Language, Chunks, Phraseology

Introduction

Collocations as a form of prepared conjunctions are extremely important for teachers and students to take seriously in the language acquisition process (Lewis, 2000). The term "collocation" can be defined as the "tendency of two or more words to co-occur in discourse" (Schmitt 2000, p. 76). Sinclair et al. (2004) defined "the co-occurrence of two items in a text within a specified environment" (p. 9), as "the way in which words co-occur in natural text in statistically significant ways" (Lewis 2000, p. 132). Over the last two decades, much emphasis has been placed on the value of teaching and mastering collocations among English as a second language/English as a foreign language (EFL) student. Collocations, unlike grammar, are random, lack predictability and common rules. It also focuses on intensive language exercises making mistakes, and learning through the

texts, dictionaries, and vocabulary rather than guessing (Koosha & Jafarpour, 2006). This is the key reason why ESL/EFL students should focus on learning collocation. First, whether ESL/EFL learners have reached intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency is determined by their knowledge of collocations. It is clearly incorrect for ESL/EFL students to receive a bachelor's degree in their field of study yet make no progress in understanding English collocations. Their understanding of English collocations will help them advance in their careers and promotions in the future (Harida, 2019). Second, mastery of L1 is assisted by knowledge and skills in collocations. The ability to communicate thoughts in L1 would undoubtedly improve with a greater knowledge of collocation in L2. Third, improving ESL/EFL learners' L2 collocation knowledge will help them use English more effectively at both the productive and receptive levels. Finally, collocations make a huge difference in language comprehension and expression (El-Dakhs, 2015).

One of the most difficult problems for Kurdish students is collocations. Collocation is a term that few people are aware of. Instead, they give more importance to grammar, and the grammar-translation method has long been used in Kurdistan to teach English. For Kurdish people, mother-tongue interference is a major issue in communication. EFL/ESL university students should have some knowledge of collocations since they started learning the English language when they were in primary school. Collocations may have been acquired automatically because they have probably met a number of simple chunks, such as taking a bath and doing exercise, or more difficult ones, such as going for good or passing away. It is also an indirect way to encourage students to realize the existence of English collocations.

The purposes of this study include; investigating Raparin University students' ability to use English collocations, to study the patterns of collocation used by the students, to attempt plausible explanations for the students' violations of English collocations, to learn how students use collocations. To be familiar with the term of collocation and how words gather in order to make new words and expressions, and to know the ability of the students to use the collocations within speaking, and which words gather to make new words and expressions, recognizing the collocations inside texts, sentences, while watching movies and listening to audios. And, assessing the Kurdish EFL students' knowledge of English collocations, identifying the sources of violations in their use of English collocations, examining the student's awareness of phraseology, and correlating the learner's level of collocation competence to their English oral and writing performance.

Research Questions

In order to conduct a survey on collocations, three specific research questions were raised as follows:

1. To what extent are the Kurdish EFL learners able to recognize and use English collocations?
2. What are the causes of violations in their collocations usage?
3. How necessary is knowledge of collocations to successful English communication ability for Kurdish learners of English?

Limitations of the Study

In the present study some limitations were identified. Firstly, the participants were small in number and limited to a particular university. Therefore, the results probably could not be generalized to all EFL learners, and the instructional setting could not represent all teaching and learning situations.

Secondly, due to semantic and syntactic differences between Kurdish and English languages, some distracters, especially prepositions in the collocation completion test, did not have the exact equivalent translation in the target language.

Thirdly, the qualitative data were obtained from few selected participants; better results could have been achieved if the data had been collected from all participants.

Finally, it was not possible to distinguish the effects of frequency from the effects of parts of speech. Therefore, no precise information about the effects of parts of speech on the production of correct collocations was obtained.

Literature Review

Notion of Collocation

The term "collocation" was initially used in relation to language acquisition. Palmer (1933), and later Firth (1957) introduced the term. Since that time, Collocation has been defined in different theoretical contexts, making an exact description difficult to obtain. One of the main reasons for the variety in collocation usage is that it is employed by researchers in a wide range of subjects, and its definition is frequently adapted to the various goals and techniques of their studies (Nesselhauf, 2004).

Definition of Collocation

Different collocation definitions will be evaluated below based on the interests and perspectives of a variety of scholars. Collocations, for example, are defined generally by Aghbar (1990). Words that are tied together in native speakers' memories and occur together in both written and spoken conversation, frequency is important. For example, catch a cold and having a severe cold are two different things. In linguistics and second language study, the term "collocation" has a lengthy history. Robins "Collocate" is a Latin

word that means "to put in order or arrange" (Martynska, 2004, p.2). On the other hand, the term collocation was first used in the 18th century (Carter & McCarthy 1988). Table 1 illustrates different definitions provided by different writers.

Table 1: Definitions of collocations

No.	Writer/Author/Linguist...	Define the term 'collocation' as ...
1.	Firth (1957b:181)	"collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word".
2.	Halliday (1966:153)	"a linear co-occurrence relationship among lexical items which co-occur together".
3.	Benson (1986:61)	"a group of words that occurs repeatedly i.e. recurs, in a language".
4.	Kjellmer (1987:133)	"... a sequence of words that occurs more than once in identical form and which is grammatically well structured".
5.	Carter and McCarthy (1988:32)	"How words typically occur with one another".
6.	Crystal (1997:69-70)	"the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items"
7.	Lewis and Hill (1998:1)	"... the way in which words occur together in predictable ways".
8.	Stubbs (2001:245-246)	"the habitual co-occurrence of words and a purely lexical relation between words in linear sequence, irrespective of any intervening syntactic boundaries".
9.	Nation (2001:324)	"closely structured groups whose parts frequently or uniquely occur together. We would also expect collocations to contain some element of grammatical or lexical unpredictability or inflexibility".
10.	Nesselhauf (2005:11)	"some kind of syntagmatic relations of words".
11.	Francis and Poole (2009:v)	"the way words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing".

As seen in the table above, finding a complete and clear definition of collocation is challenging since, as Schmid (2003, p.238) points out, "not all requirements are expressly listed, but some are presupposed because they appear so apparent". To define collocations, Schmid (2003) provides five alternative criteria: 1) The necessity of two or more words; 2) their adjacency, at least within a specific period; 3) their combined recurrence (co-occurrence); 4) their mutual anticipation or predictability; and 5) idiomatically.

Classification of Collocation

In its linguistic meaning, the term "collocation" is pretty new, and its definition is

still up for debate. Because of the debate and even misunderstanding around collocations, some linguists classify them as "fixed phrases." Fixed expressions, such as *prim and proper*, *alive and kicking*, *back and forth*, *wear and tear*, *toss and turn*, or idioms like *rains cats and dogs*, are handled as expressions of fixed word sequences.

For the sake of simplicity and clarity, collocations have been classified by a number of scholars. They classify them into lexical and grammatical categories. There is a distinction to be drawn between these two categories. A lexical collocation is a formation in which a verb, noun, adjective, or adverb connects to other words in a predictable way, as in the following examples:

- Adverb + adjective (e.g. *completely satisfied*, *totally different*, *fully aware*).
- Adjective + noun (e.g. *maiden voyage*, *fast food*, *regular exercise*).
- Noun + verb (e.g. *lions roar*, *birds tweet*, *dogs bark*).
- Verb + noun (e.g. *make bed*, *commit murder*, and *do homework*).
- Noun + noun (e.g. *summer school*, *ceasefire agreement*)
- Verb + expression (e.g. *fill with horror*, *run out of money*, *burst into tears*).
- Verb +adverb (e.g. *learn quickly*, *listen carefully*, and *whisper softly*).

On the other hand, a grammatical collocation is a formation in which a verb or adjective is followed by a specific preposition, or a noun is followed by a specific form of a verb. As in the following examples:

- Verb + preposition (e.g. *rely on* (NOT *rely of*); *depend on* (NOT *of*))
- Adjective + preposition (e.g. *sick of* (NOT *sick at*); *good at* (NOT *in*)).
- Noun + particular form of a verb (e.g. *decision to lift it* (not *decision lifting it*)).

Collocations can also be divided into three categories: open, bound, and limited collocations. Open collocations are those that allow you to add as many words as you like, bound collocations are those that are limited to a few patterns, and limited collocations are those that are limited to a few patterns. Unlike confined collocations, where one word has a metaphorical connotation not found outside that particular context, open collocations may be comprehended by the literal meaning of its components. A "bridge category between collocations and idioms" is a bound collocation (Nofal, 2012, p. 83).

Importance of Collocations

A number of scholars have emphasized the importance and usefulness of collocations in the acquisition of L2 vocabulary and communicative ability (Benson 1985, Cowie 1981, Lewis 1997). According to Aghbar (1990), the importance of collocations in

language, as well as non-native speakers' lack of understanding of them, resulted in poor performance. On his studies, Leffa (1998) believed that collocation was better than encyclopedic knowledge. (Ellis, 2001) posited that collocational knowledge is the root of language knowledge. In order to obtain fluency, it is important to use collocation correctly to some degree, "all fluent and appropriate language requires collocational knowledge" (Nation, 2001, p.318). Therefore, collocations are important and special, and it is clear that their use is helpful in boosting a learner's language fluency and helping learners achieve native fluency.

Previous Studies about Collocations

A linguistic aspect of a language is collocation. For example, collocations are an important part of the English language, and ESL/EFL students at all levels must employ them in their spoken and written English. Using collocations, for example, allows students to talk more smoothly and write more effectively (Alhaysony, 2017). It improves the clarity, naturalness, and understandability of their speech. It also helps their ability to sound like a native speaker (Al-Khawaldeh, Jaradat, Al-momani & Bani-Khair, 2016). Furthermore, using collocations is an effective method for expressing yourself in a variety of settings. According to psycholinguistic studies, the human brain retains words in chunks or blocks more easily than single words. Famous writers and ELT professionals such as Ur (1996), Richards (2002), and Thornbury (2009) suggest that collocational ability is required for English learners to promote EFL and ESL macro-skills at the same time (productive and receptive skills). Richards (2002) used the word "restriction" to describe the role of collocation structures in correctly generating lexical or grammatical collocations. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of collocation as a research topic and an important language segment to teach to ESL/EFL students. Collocations have an impact on English competence in a variety of EFL and ESL contexts. For example, Yazdandoost, Salih, and Kafipour (2014) looked at the link between collocational competency and L2 proficiency in Iranian EFL students. Collocation knowledge was shown to have an important role in English learning, and an understanding of collocation was found to be a requirement for successful language acquisition in the Iranian environment. Some other studies have demonstrated the effects of collocations on different aspects of English in other contexts. For instance, Hadi (2014) studied 100 Iraqi EFL undergraduates who were evaluated to see how well they could use lexical collocations. The research looked at the reasons for the interviewees' issues with English collocations. Overall, the results revealed a low level of collocational proficiency. Substitutions, literal transfer, and generalizations were identified as three factors of low ability, according to the data. According to the study (English), collocations are crucial for understanding the target language.

Similarly, Bhumadhana (2011) observes At Walailak University in Thailand, 155 English majors were researched to see how they used collocations and what link there was between collocation use and writing abilities. The participants were split into three categories based on their familiarity with academic verb collocations: low, moderate, and high. The results of an academic verb collocation writing exam of 18 academic verbs on an academic word list were used to make this category. The studies indicate that there was a strong beneficial link between the usage of academic verb collocations and students' writing abilities at a level of 5.

According to the research, collocations are also important in language learning and teaching in the classroom. Also "unearthed the ability of some Saudi EFL learners to use English verb + noun collocations through a collocation test." The study reported some difficulties that the participants encountered in producing English collocations of this type: verb + noun. The author argued that this could be attributed partially to the influence of L1 (Arabic) and the lack of collocational competence of L2 (English) "(Brashi, 2017).

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 60 Kurdish EFL students (male and female) 35 of them are female and 25 of them are male, from Raparin University in Iraqi Kurdistan. They were chosen randomly from various stages. Because 10 of the participants returned the study with incomplete or incorrect answers, the total number of questionnaires gathered was 50. As a result, they were not included in the statistical analysis. The participants were not obliged to take the test. In contrast, they were very happy to participate in the study in order to determine their ability of use collocations.

Instruments

The data collection instruments used in this study were a true-or-false test in the form of collocations and another test for which we chose some common collocations to test the students' familiarity with them. In order to make the dataset more manageable, the quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) program, version (28). First, descriptive statistics were computed to sum up the results and show the frequencies and mean scores of the motivational strategies. Second, the gender and qualifications of participants were computed and presented using tables.

Procedure

To collect the data, we met the students one by one in order to give them the

handout in which the questions were presented, then described the handout and analyzed the questions and we clarified each questions especially for the students at first stage and for those students who have faced difficulty.

Data Analysis

Two research tools were used to collect data: the True/False and Agree/Disagree tests. Each of these tools is outlined below. A test was designed for this purpose to elicit the subjects' collocation competency. It consisted of two parts: True/False questions (10 items) and an Agree/Disagree test (10 items).

Data Discussion and Results

First Section

The obtained data is depicted in the charts below. First of all, in the first line, 39 participants chose the right collocation and 11 participants chose the wrong collocation. Secondly, the second line shows that 35 students have chosen the right collocation and 15 students have chosen the wrong collocation. Also, the third line shows that 17 participants chose true collocation and 33 participants chose false collocation. So, the fourth line indicates that 38 students answered correctly while 12 students answered incorrectly. However, the fifth line indicates that 39 testers answered right and 11 testers answered wrong. Furthermore, in the sixth line, the lowest level of the participants answered true (15 participants), and the highest level of participants answered wrong (35 participants). In the seventh line, 24 students answered true and 26 students answered false. Furthermore, the eighth line shows that 29 students have chosen true collocation and 21 students have chosen false collocation, and in the ninth line, the highest level of the students answered right in comparison to other lines, which is 40 students, and the lowest number of students answered wrong in comparison to other lines, which has 10 students. In addition, 38 participants in the last line selected the right answer, and 12 participants selected the wrong collocation.

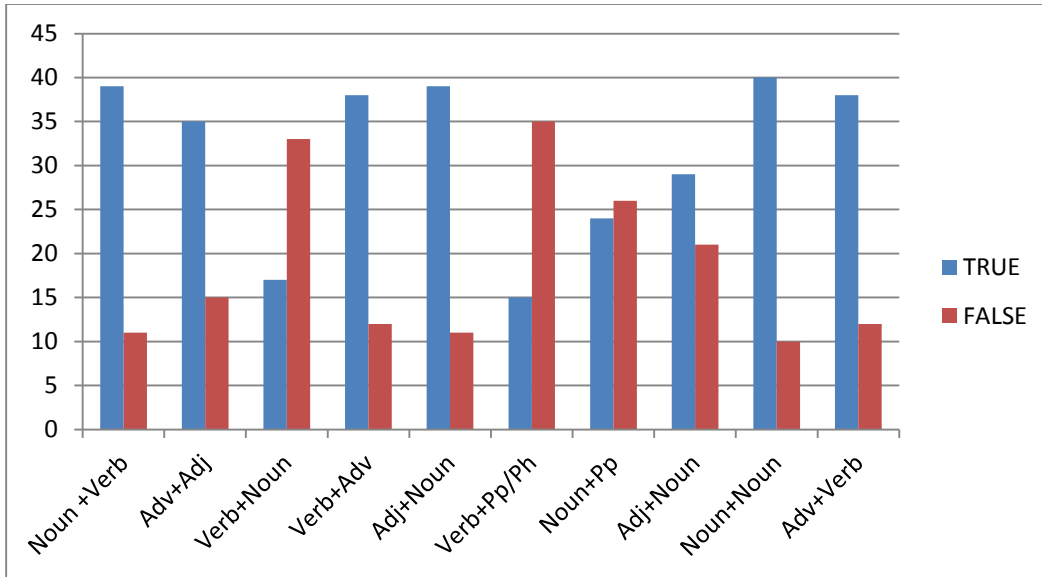


Figure 1: The results of true/false questions

Second Section

The data obtained from chart below shows that the test takers strongly agreed 200 times, agreed 171 times, disagreed 103 times, and strongly disagreed 26 times.

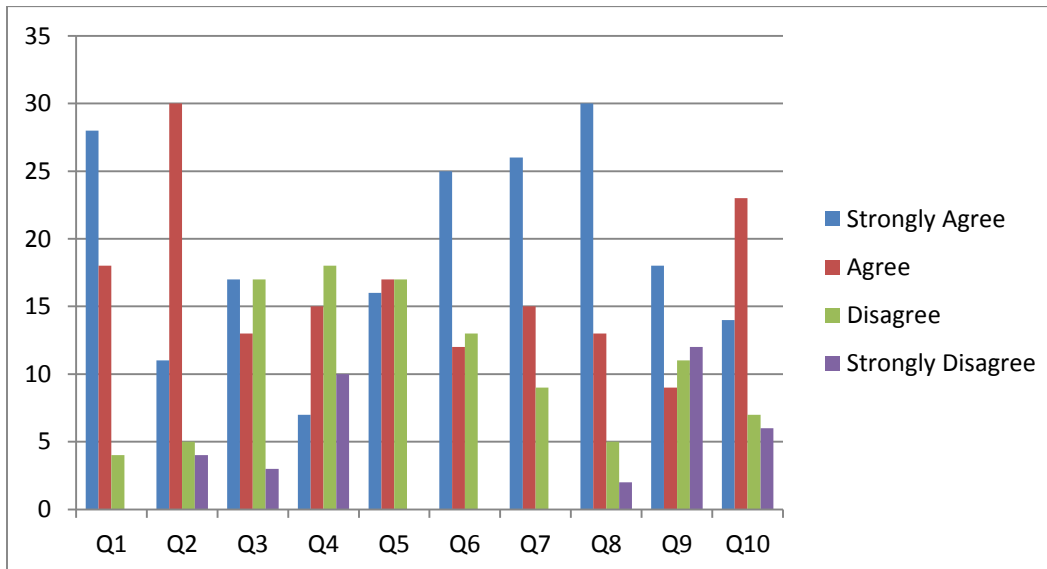


Figure 2: The results of the agree/disagree questions

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that the students' knowledge of English collocation is rather limited. It's reasonable to conclude that the students were unaware of collocations' existence. However, they were most likely not really good at vocabulary specialization. The results were marked by Bahns and Elda (1993), who state that "learners' knowledge of collocations does not develop in parallel with their knowledge of vocabulary, and this may be in part due to the fact that collocations are not taught and that learners do not, therefore, pay any attention to learning them." Also, Lewis (1993) points out that "raising awareness of collocation can be incorporated into the teaching and learning process to expand the learners' mental lexicon efficiently." Moreover, in order to improve language development, collocation should be encouraged in second foreign language classes. The study findings revealed that the students' ability to use (noun + noun) collocations was at the highest level (80%). It is plausible to explain that this pattern has been one of the most familiar to the students since their earlier years of English language learning. On the contrary, the (verb + prepositional phrase) collocation was used correctly at the lowest level (30%). This finding shows that the (verb + prepositional phrase) collocation violations were found by the students to be the most difficult and troublesome. We also discovered that the students' ability to collocate was not directly related to the number of years they had been learning English. In the other parts of the questionnaires, we revealed that the highest level of the ability of the students to use the collocation of the question NO.8 (60%) was strongly agreed with by the most participants, and the lowest level of the students' ability to use collocations was with the questions NO.5, 6, and 7 (0%), where the students strongly disagreed with the collocation. The questionnaire's students' ability to use collocations depends on the collocation differences, and we declared that the familiarity of the students with collocations depends on their experience of using the English language.

The results of both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses revealed many results. Firstly, a significant relationship was found between the frequency of the collocations and the students' correct answers. Secondly, verb + P.P/Ph collocations were the most difficult type for Kurdish EFL students. Thirdly, the number of students answering an item correctly changed significantly according to whether the students were familiar or not with collocations.

The findings confirmed that the student's ability to use collocations changed based on the student's experience and types of collocation. The results also revealed that learners' collocational errors frequently involve the use of synonym(s) for the collocate. Furthermore, collocations are not particularly studied like other parts of language, and likewise some students do not face difficulties with using collocations during writing and speaking.

Conclusion

The objective of the present study was to explore the ability of the students to use collocations made by EFL learners at Raparin University in Kurdistan. The participants were Kurdish EFL seniors. For data collection, two different instruments were used. The first instrument was the collocation true or-false test, which was used to explore the forms of collocation. The Agree/disagree test, which was the second instrument, was used to find out whether the students were familiar with collocations or not. The data obtained was analyzed to address the student's ability to use collocations. To calculate the data correctly the SPSS program has used, the results were presented in the study to reveal the aims of the study. The results were presented in the charts and the results discussed in the last chart.

Recommendations

The following ideas could be used in further studies in the domain of collocations:

1. In this study, the focus was on some specific types of collocations (i.e. V+N, Adj+N and V+Prep); further studies can consider EFL learners' sources of errors in other types of collocations such as Adv+Adj, N+Prep and N+V. As a result, we can gain a deeper understanding of what leads EFL learners to make errors in collocations.

2. In the present study, the students made errors in L1 congruent collocations; in future research, the difference in difficulty in L1 equivalent collocations or the reasons for committing errors in L1 congruent collocations could be investigated.

3. Since this study was limited to a small group of a particular proficiency level at Raparin University, learners from different proficiency levels at various universities in Kurdistan could participate in further research. Consequently, detailed information about Kurdish EFL learners' collocational knowledge would be achieved.

4. The aim of conducting further research could be compiling a list of target collocations for EFL students to study with taking into account some basic factors that substantially cause collocational errors.

5. Further research could work to provide precise information about the effects of parts of speech on the production of correct collocations.

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