



Difficulties and Problems that face Sudanese EFL learners Students in learning English Collocations

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ABSTRACT :

The aim of this study is to investigate, identify and analyze difficulties facing Sudanese students in learning English collocations. The sample of the study involved eighty secondary school students. The researcher adapted a multiple choice test for students. The test was meant to evaluate the performance of Sudanese EFL Learners on both lexical and grammatical collocations which proposed by Benson, Benson, & Ilson (1997). The findings confirmed that Sudanese Learners face difficulties with English collocations. With regard to the poor result of lexical and grammatical collocations as well as various strategies, negative transfer, synonymy and overgeneralization that students resorted to. The study provides some recommendations to tackle these problems and enhance the processes of teaching and learning English collocations in Sudan.

Keywords: Collocations, Categorization of collocations, Learning strategy, Learners' problem,

المستخلص :

هدف هذه الدراسة هو استقصاء وتحديد وتحليل الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلاب السودانيين في تعلم المتلازمات في اللغة الإنجليزية. العينة في الدراسة تشمل ثمانون طالبا بالمرحلة الثانوية. استخدم الباحث اختبار الاختيار من متعدد للطلاب. قصد من الاختبار تقييم أداء الطلاب السودانيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية في كل من المتلازمات المعجمية والنحوية والتي وضعها بنسونواليسون (1997). أكدت النتائج ان الطلاب السودانيين يواجهون صعوبات في المتلازمات بالنسبة للغة الانجليزية. فيما يتعلق بالنتائج الضعيفة في المتلازمات المعجمية والنحوية وكذلك الاستراتيجيات المتعددة التي يلجا إليها الطلاب من نقل سالب من اللغة الام ومترادفات وتعميم, اعطت الدراسة بعض التوصيات لحل هذه المشاكل وتحسين طرق تدريس وتعليم متلازمات اللغة الانجليزية في السودان.
كلمات مفتاحية : المتلازمات اللفظية ، تصنيف المتلازمات اللفظية ، استراتيجية تعلم ، مشاكل المتعلم .

INTRODUCTION :

"No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive". (Mohandas K. Gandhi, Indian nationalist and spiritual leader). The quotation above emphasizes the fact that learning another language gives the learner the ability to understand the others culture. It gives the learner the ability to communicate and to exchange

views with people all over the world. It opens new horizons for learners.

As learning a foreign language is important, there are difficulties of learning it. Language teaching practice assumes that most of the difficulties that learners face in the study of English are a consequence of the degree to



which the native language differs from English. These difficulties can occur in any combinations and at different levels of severity in three areas of language: the syntactic, the phonological or the orthographic area and the semantic area. (Leonore Ganschaw and Elk Shneider, 2006)

"While the field of language teaching and learning is rich in studies of grammar, phonology and orthography, research on strangeness of linguistic forms and expressions is lagging behind. Therefore, studies are needed stemming from the fact that lexical errors have not been given due attention" (Taiwo, 2004). The present study sheds light on difficulties and problems facing Sudanese students in the field of sense relations especially collocations. In this research I try to add one more ring to the chain of the studies in the area of lexis.

Despite the lack of a common definition, the literature on collocations shows an agreement among researchers and language pedagogists as to the importance of collocations for second/foreign language learning. It has been suggested that an increase of the students' knowledge of collocations will result in an improvement of their speaking skills, their listening comprehension and reading speed (Brown, 1974). Collocational knowledge could also help students overcome problems of vocabulary usage and style (Leed and Nakhimousky, 1979), while it has also been considered especially effective in sentence generation.

Defining collocation

The term collocation has been defined by different scholars but in a similar fashion. It was introduced by Firth (1957) to refer to a combination of words associated with each other. Sinclair (1991) defines collocations as "items that occur physically together or have

strong chances of being mentioned together' (p. 170). According to Lewis (1997), collocation is defined as "the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency" (p. 8). The occurrence of collocation is statistically significant (Lewis, 2000). In support of Lewis (1997, 2000), Hill (2000) suggests that "collocation is a predictable combination of words" (p. 51). Examples of common English collocations are rancid butter, make a decision, Internet access etc. Hill (2000) also noticed that some collocations are fixed and highly predictable from one of the component words. For instance, the verb shrug apparently almost always co-selects the noun one's shoulder as its neighboring word, i.e. a collocate. In this way, to shrug one's shoulder can be viewed as a strong or restricted collocation. In contrast, some collocations are considered so weak that their occurrences often go unnoticed or seem too general as the two component words are inclined to occur freely. For example, the adjective good can co-occur with a tremendous variety of noun collocates, e.g. a good boy, a good school, a good teacher, good food, etc., all of which are considered weak collocations.

Approaches to collocations:

The term collocation has been labeled in a variety of ways e.g. prefabs, multi-word units etc. and defined in different manners in both linguistics and language teaching. The only consensus, as Nesselhauf (2005, p. 11) pointed out, is that collocation refers to 'some kind of syntagmatic relation of words'. Gitsaki (1999), in this regard, reviewed in meticulousness the three main approaches to collocations: lexical, semantic and structural. The lexical approach was based on the idea of word meaning at the lexical level first proposed by Firth (1957). One often quoted example is that one of the meanings



of 'night' is its collocability with 'dark', and one of the meanings of 'dark' is its collocability with 'night' (p. 196). Halliday et al. (1964) explained collocation as the tendency of a lexical item to co-occur with one or more words. Sinclair (1966, p. 411) focused on the likelihood of co-occurrence but admitted that 'there are virtually no impossible collocations, but some are more likely than others'. Sinclair (1991, p. 170) went on to define collocation as 'the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text' and distinguished the 'significant' (i.e. frequent) collocations from the 'casual' (i.e. infrequent) ones. Collocation has thus become a merely statistical matter. Unlike the lexical approach, the semantic approach perceived the meaning of a lexical item as the semantic properties of that item. That is to say, it is the semantic properties of a lexical item that determine its collocates (Chomsky, 1965; Lyons, 1977; Katz and Fodor, 1963; Lehrer, 1974; Cruse, 1986). This approach, as Gitsaki (1999, p. 15) commented, cannot explain the large number of idiosyncratic co-occurrences that are arbitrarily restricted. While the lexical and semantic approaches focused only on lexical words, the structural approach took into consideration both lexical and grammatical collocations. The BBI Combinatory Dictionary (Benson et al., 1997) defined collocation as words which 'regularly combine with certain other words or grammatical constructions.' Eight categories of grammatical collocations and seven categories of lexical collocations were identified. Grammatical collocations consist of a dominant word – noun, adjective/participle, verb – and a preposition or a grammatical construction', and lexical collocations have structures such as 'verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, adverb + adjective, adverb + verb'. The structural

approach is by comparison more pedagogical as it takes into account collocation of not only lexical but also grammatical. The current study has adopted Benson, Benson, & Ilson (1997)'s collocation classification: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations words because the model provides a thorough explanation of the classification criteria and easy-to-follow examples.

Collocation learning strategies and Relevant L2 studies:

There appear many different strategies applied by language learners in their attempt to acquire L2 collocations. This research summarizes only some major learning strategies that often lead learners to collocational errors in L2 English: first language transfer, synonymy and overgeneralization. .

First language transfer

Learners' native language (L1) largely has an impact on their subsequent learning of L2 collocations (Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005). Learners' reliance upon their L1 collocational knowledge may represent their assumption that there is a one-to-one correspondence between L1 and L2 collocational choices. Fortunately, where there is an exactly identical match between collocations in both languages, transfer from learners' mother tongue could result in positive, satisfactory production (Ellis, 2008). For instance, the combination "a white lie and relationship with " appears to be possible in both Sudanese colloquial (Arabic) and English. As a result, it is very likely that Sudanese learners will become successful in transferring this particular collocation from L1 Arabic to L2 English. Nonetheless, such success based on native language transfer is not always the case (Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005). Discrepancies between L1 and L2 collocations can also cause some problems for EFL learners. That is,



whenever collocations in the mother tongue and the target language do not match, deviant collocational structures often arise. According to several previous studies, native language influence is noticeable in EFL learners' collocations. By and large, there obviously exists negative transfer from L1. Bisk-up (1992), in investigating Polish and German EFL learners' performance in English collocation use, revealed that the learners, based on risk taking, did transfer their L1 collocational knowledge to their production of L2 collocations, thus evidently leading to erroneous use of English collocations. For example, while the target like collocation in English is to set a record, the Polish learners tended to use to state a record, which is indicative of an L1 collocational pattern. Likewise, the German learners were found to produce the L1-based deviation to lend a book shop instead of the target like version to run a bookshop.

In a similar way, Bahns (1993) and Bahns&Eldaw (1993) reported on the role of mother tongue in English collocation acquisition. That is, German learners of English, in a translation task from German to English, were found to be successful with transferring from L1 collocational knowledge when L2 collocations have L1 equivalents. However, negative transfer was also remarkable when there appears non-congruence between collocations in both languages L1 interference can be seen in Huang (2001) as well when Taiwanese EFL university students, having been asked to do a sentence-completion test, created L2 combinations based on L1, such as a black horse rather than the target-like collocation a dark horse.

Nesselhauf (2003) provided support for the previously mentioned studies in that L1 influence, in her study of collocations used by

German EFL learners, is considerable, resulting in L2 errors for several times. She also confirmed the significance of native language impact on L2 collocation learning, suggesting that since L1-L2 collocational incompatibility is a major source of errors in learner language, English teachers should concentrate on such non-congruent collocations in the two languages in order to prevent learners from committing such transfer errors.

It is also worth noticing that in Koya (2003), even high-proficiency students seem to heavily rely on their knowledge of L1 collocations, which came as a surprise to the researcher himself since he had predicted to see far less evidence of L1 transfer in this group of high-proficiency students. On the other hand, low-proficiency learners were found to apply an avoidance strategy and astoundingly depended less on their first language. This supplies counter evidence against much past literature which indicated that L1 transfer is characteristic of low-proficiency learners (e.g. Ellis, 1987; Odlin, 1989).

In addition, Fan (2009), in an examination of Hong Kong ESL learners' collocation production in writing, also discovered an adverse effect that L1 Chinese had on the participants' use of English collocations. In particular, the study found non-standard L2 collocations that seem to result from word-for-word translation from Chinese, such as left/right face or left side face, which are not present in native speakers' corpora (Fan, 2009, p.118). Another study that is in line with the aforementioned ones as to L1 transfer is Ying (2009). In the study of English collocations produced by Chinese speakers, i.e. English majors and non-English majors, Ying found that collocations which have no translation equivalents in L1 are considered difficult, in



comparison to those which are congruent with L1. In more details, the learners probably searched for L1 equivalents with no awareness of L1-L2 incongruity and then produced L2 deviant combinations, which accords with Nesselhauf (2003). Moreover, for both groups of learners, errors in lexical collocations clearly outnumber those in grammatical collocations.

With respect to research on L2 acquisition of English collocations by Arab EFL learners, L1 transfer has also been prevalent. As Dr. Abdulmoneim Mahmoud presents empirical data verifying the informal observations and theoretic assertions that EFL learners produce 'unnatural' word combinations. He found that sixty one percent of the incorrect combinations could be due to negative transfer from Arabic. The researcher's example of negative transfer for Sudanese 'drink soup instead of eat soup'. Another example is "heavy tea instead of strong tea." It is evident that interference from EFL learners' native language plays a crucial role in L2 collocation acquisition. As shown in the aforementioned studies, the first language seems to have a negative effect on their use of English collocations, resulting in L2 erroneous combinations. In 2.5.2, another learning strategy also causing problems for EFL students, i.e. synonymy, is discussed.

Synonymy strategy :

Aside from dependence on their native tongue, EFL learners in the process of learning collocations are sometimes seen to adopt an analogy strategy referred to as synonymy strategy. This is often used by learners whose L2 proficiency is limited. They may try substituting a synonym for a word in L2, unaware of constituting a collocational violation. In actuality, a very limited number of synonyms in English can occur in the same grammatical pattern (Nation, 2001). In other words, words

that are very close in meaning do not always share the same grammatical collocation. For instance, even though the verbs ask and plead are semantically similar, i.e. involving making a request (Cambridge advanced learners' dictionary, 2008, pp.74-75 & 1085), the grammatical patterns in which the verbs are likely to occur are different. That is, the verb ask is used in the pattern ask someone + infinitive with to, whereas the verb plead requires the preposition with, as in plead with someone+ infinitive with to. For this reason, a substitution of plead for ask in the grammatical pattern of the latter verb, i.e. without with, causes ungrammaticality in English (Phoocharoensil, 2010, p. 242).

According to many studies of L2 English collocation acquisition, synonymy has appeared to be a common learning strategy. In Farghal&Obiedat (1995), it was indicated that Arabic EFL learners greatly relied on the open-choice principle for word selection, replacing a word with its synonym. Such a strategy often led them to deviant, ungrammatical collocations in English. In a similar vein, Howarth (1996, 1998) demonstrated that L2 learners seemed to draw an analogy between collocates of two synonyms, thus frequently resulting in errors in the target language. For example, they produced the deviant combination *adopt ways, which was presumably caused by analogy with the correct collocation adopt an approach (Howarth, 1998, p. 41).

Like the above studies having been mentioned, Zughol& Abdul-Fattah (2001) discovered assumed synonymy in the use of English collocations by Arabic speakers. It was reported that as a consequence of the nature of the instructional input the learners received in class and the impact of bilingual dictionaries, the learners' collocation use was evidently based on



a synonymy strategy, which violates the selectional restrictions, i.e. semantic constraints, of the target language. For instance, the verb failed was incorrectly employed as opposed to defeated in the sentence *The enemy was failed in the battle (Zughol& Abdul-Fattah, 2001, p.11).

As regards some research studies on Sudanese learners' acquisition of English collocations, synonymy has also been discovered. Employing test as an instrument, Younis (2008) investigated Sudanese EFL learners collocational knowledge and assessed the major causes of learners' collocational problems.. He attributed the deficiency in the subjects' collocation knowledge to a number of reasons among them is synonymy. A clear example given in this study is " say a lie instead of tell a lie", which may reflect the learners' confusion over the use of the synonyms say and tell.

Overgeneralization:

Expanding a certain form or expression to a different contextual use in the target language. Example of this is interpreting (kasarah ?atashahu) simply as (ballari:gahu) then translating it into witted his thirst instead of quench thirst.

Granger (1998) shows that French learners of English tended to repeatedly employ the intensifier very in the combination of adverb + adjective. Furthermore, some other collocations, e.g. deeply-rooted, recursively occurred in their writing as well. Granger, Paquot&Rayson (2006) corroborated Granger (1998) in that EFL learners seem to overuse a limited group of collocations perhaps because they stick to familiar formulaic sequences which they feel safe to use. Similarly, Shih (2000) was devoted to an investigation of overused collocations in a Taiwanese learner corpus of English, focusing on a set of synonyms big, large, and great. The

findings from a comparative study of Taiwanese Learner Corpus of English and British National Corpus (BNC) showed that the collocations with big were significantly overused by Taiwanese learners. More precisely, the learners used big far more frequently than native speakers normally do when describing abstract concepts, whereas the use of big referring to concrete objects occurs with more frequency in the native speaker corpus. Shih posited that repetition is viewed as a simplification strategy or overgeneralization applied by Taiwanese learners when faced with L2 collocational problems. In other words, the word big is perhaps extended to abstract concepts, which is not a normal practice of native speakers'.

According to Zughol& Abdul-Fattah (2001), overgeneralization, i.e. the extension of the use of a certain L2 feature to another, has been found as a source of incorrect use of L2 English collocations, and this strategy is viewed as a characteristic of learner language. The subjects in their study confused the words shame and ashamed, thereby extending the use of ashamed, while the word shame was intended. In this study the subjects confused the words migrate and immigrate. Most of them chose " animals immigrate instead of animals migrate." Another example is the extension of the rule of 'to' followed by infinitive to a phrase like look forward to 'hear' instead of hearing or use 'for' replacing 'to' with hearing.

Questions of the research:

The research poses the questions below:

- 1 – Is there a significant L1(Arabic) influence that negatively affect the use of collocations in English?
- 2 –What are the types of difficulties encountered by EFL learners in using English collocations?



3- What strategies do Sudanese EFL students employ to deal with different types of collocations?

The research hypothesizes the following assumptions as factors of collocation problems:

1 - The mother tongue language (Arabic) interference plays the vital role in collocation difficulties.

2- The lexical collocations are more difficult than the grammatical ones.

3- Some major learning strategies that often lead learners to collocational errors are first language transfer (Arabic), synonymy and overgeneralization.

Methodology

Introduction:

To achieve the purpose of the study " EFL Learners Problems and Difficulties in learning English Collocations at Secondary School level." The researcher adopts descriptive analytical method which depends on the description of the phenomena. In addition to the data gathered to find the reasons that lie behind the occurrence of those difficulties. Two tools were used, a test for students and a questionnaire for teachers.

Population and sample of the study.

The study was conducted at secondary schools in Khartoum and Dongla, Sudan. 80 subjects constitute the sample of the study are drawn from third class students both boys and girls. The choice of third secondary students, because they are ready preparing themselves for secondary school certificate exams. Most of them spent at least 8 years of studying English. Their age is between 17 and 19.

Instruments of the study.

A multiple-choice test of collocation consisting of fifteen items was adopted in the study. Participants were provided with four options to choose from. They were asked to choose the

word or phrase that best completes the sentence. The test was meant to evaluate the performance of Sudanese EFL Learners on both lexical and grammatical collocations which proposed by Benson, Benson, & Ilson (1997). The test items dealt with (adj. + n, adv. + v, v + n, n +v, v + adv., adv. + adj., n + prep., adj. + prep., prep. + n, v + prep, adv. + preposition) collocations. To ensure that the chosen items were described as collocations, the researcher consulted the Oxford Advanced learners Dictionary. However, its validity and reliability were tested again by the researcher.

The number of items related to each type of collocations, are eight lexical and seven grammatical. The subjects received the test during their normal class. In order to make the participants cooperative, they were told that the purpose of the test would be explained later.

Data Analysis

The data were then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The framework used in the current study was based on Benson et al. (1997), who have proposed two main types of collocations: lexical and grammatical collocations. To be more precise, six types of lexical collocations were the focus of this research project, i.e. (adj. + n, adv. + v, v + n, n +v, v + adv., adv. + adj.). As for grammatical collocations, five types were analyzed: (noun + preposition, verb + preposition, adjective + preposition, preposition + noun, v + adv. + preposition) collocations. Only the incorrect collocations were examined. After receiving the responses to the test the researcher analyzed, categorized and identified them according to their classification (lexical and grammatical). The whole answers (right or wrong) of each student has been counted and entered into the computer using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) programme.

Findings:

Questions	sub	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
		Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.
4- You should not eat too much _____ it is not good for your health .	adj. + n	38	47.5	42	52.5
8- When she's cold , she really loves to drink _____ tea .	ad j+ n	4	5.0	76	95.0
9- I'm sorry , I _____ forgot your birthday , please forgive me .	adv. + v	40	50.0	40	50.0
1- Don't lie , just _____ the truth .	v + n	22	27.5	58	72.5
5- He betrayed her love and _____ her heart .	v + n	56	70.0	24	30.0
7- Some kinds of animals _____ for finding food .	n +v	38	47.5	42	52.5
14- My watch _____ , so I could not tell you the time .	n +v	64	80.0	16	20.0
3- Dave , come here and sit _____ next to me .	n + adv.	55	68.8	25	31.2
15-Why are you giving me your broken computer ?I don't want it , it's _____ useless	adv. + adj.	40	50.0	40	50.0
Total		49.5%		50.5%	

Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015)

The data from the participants results, as shown in Table 1, reveal that students have difficulties in dealing with lexical collocations. With respect to deviations in the lexical collocations, the subjects appeared to be troubled most with adjective + noun combinations item 4 and item 8 with an average of only 26.2% who answered correctly . An average of 48.6% (item 1 + item 5) answered verb + noun collocations correctly. Both the adverb + verb and the adverb +

adjective are answered correctly with a percentage of 50%. The average percentage of students who answered the noun + verb collocation(item 7 and 14) correctly is 63.7%. The verb +adverb lexical collocation seemed to be the least problematic as (68.8%) of the subjects answered correctly. According to this result the adjective + noun collocation is the most difficult concerning lexical collocations whereas verb + adverb is the easiest or the least difficult. This contradicts Omyma's finding that the adjective + noun is the easiest.

Table 2: Grammatical Collocations Result

Questions	Sub	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
		Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.
13- Do you have a good relationship _____ most of your relatives ?	N + prep	49	61.3	31	38.7
2- I am thinking of changing my job because I am tired _____ travelling all the	Adj +prep	25	31.3	55	68.7

time .					
12- She's rather worried _____ Khaled's studies .	Ad j+ prep	61	76.3	19	23.7
11- How long were you _____ the phone for ?Don't you get tired of talking so much ?	Prep +n	35	43.8	45	56.2
10- I think he works _____ the military hospital.	v+ prep	55	68.8	25	31.2
6- I look forward _____ hearing from you soon .	Adv +prep	38	47.5	42	52.5
Total		54.8%		45.2%	

Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015) With regard to grammatical collocational errors, the most problematic type was the preposition + noun(43.8%) answered correctly. The second problematic was the verb + adverb + preposition category(47.5%) answered correctly, followed by the adjective + preposition average of items 2 and 12(53.7%). Then came noun + preposition (61.3%). The easiest grammatical collocation was verb +preposition which (68.8%) of the subjects answered correctly. This contradicts Supakorn(On line Paper), finding that the most problematic type was the verb + preposition collocations.

All in all, as can be seen in the above tables 1 and 2 the most difficult of both lexical and grammatical collocations is the adjective + noun while the easiest is shared between noun + adverb and verb + preposition with a percentage of 68.8% of subjects answering each correctly. If we compare the total results of the lexical and grammatical collocations, we notice that subjects' result in grammatical collocations is better than their result in lexical collocations.

The testees who answered grammatical collocations correctly(54.8%) outnumber those who answered the lexical collocations correctly (49.5%). In other words lexical collocations are more difficult than grammatical ones. This result validates and supports the research hypothesis number 2 which claims that the major problems for EFL learners are predominately lexical rather than grammatical. In his study DrAbdulgoneim Mahmoud presents empirical data verifying the informal observations and theoretic assertions that EFL learners produce 'unnatural' word combinations. A total of 420 collocations were found in 42 essays written by Arabic-speaking university students majoring in English. About two thirds of these collocations (64%) were incorrect and 80% of these were lexical collocations as opposed to grammatical ones. His result indicates that lexical collocations are more difficult than the grammatical ones. I think one main reason that makes grammatical collocations easier than lexical ones is that they can be found easily in dictionaries and grammar books. Beside that grammar is always taught explicitly.

Table 3: Total of Both Lexical and Grammatical Results

Negative Lexical& grammatical collocations results	48.3
Positive Lexical& grammatical collocations results	51.7

Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015) As shown in the table 3 above, Sudanese students have difficulty in learning English collocations. 48.3% of students didn't answer correctly while 51.7 percent answered correctly. We notice that the result include the positive transfer and everyday life language items in which the highest percentage of students answered correctly. 70.4% answered the collocations which are congruent in the two languages (English and Arabic). The other high percentage 72.5% answered everyday language items of the test correctly. " Lexis and collocations in particular provide a major difficulty in mastering foreign languages."(Crystal, 1992) as they are patterns to be learned as a whole and not mean what the individual words in them mean. Benson et al also stated that collocations are more subject to

arbitrariness arising from common usage than from rules. Researchers associate the poor collocational knowledge to factors like unfamiliarity with English collocation structures and the negative transfer from L1(Hussein, 1990).

According to the data drawn from the above tables ,it was very likely that certain learning strategies associated with cognitive processes (Selinker, 1992) were applied in an attempt to use English collocations, most of which apparently lead to erroneous combinations in the target language. The most prominent strategy upon which they seemed to depend was their native language,i.e. Arabic. Additionally, some appeared to use synonymy and overgeneralization, to be discussed in detail below.

Table (4)

1- Don't lie , just _____ the truth .			
say	tell	Offer	provide
41	22	5	12
2- I am thinking of changing my job because I am tired _____ travelling all the time			
to	By	For	of
17	14	23	25
8- When she's cold , she really loves to drink _____ tea .			
hard	strong	Heavy	red
11	4	12	53

Table (4/1)

Table 4/1 : Strategy: Mother Tongue Negative Transfer				
Questions	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
	Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.
1- Don't lie , just _____ the truth .	22	27.5	58	72.5
2- I am thinking of changing my job because I am tired _____ travelling all the time .	25	31.3	54	67.5
8- When she's cold , she really loves to drink _____ tea .	4	5.0	76	95.0
Total	21.2%		78.3%	



Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015)

Sudanese learners of English relied on their L1 (Arabic) knowledge, transferring an equivalent from Arabic to English. Unfortunately, where there are collocational mismatches between Arabic and English, errors clearly arise. In the above table (4), items 1, 2 and 8 of the test, 41 students chose say the truth instead of tell the truth in item 1. Say the truth is transferred from Arabic yaqool al-haqiqa. In item 2 as mentioned in table 4 about 37 students out of 80 have chosen for and by instead of choosing the correct preposition of. Their wrong choices indicate transfer from Arabic. In item 8 of the test as shown in table 4 the majority of the testees 53 (66.3%) have chosen the incorrect answer red tea instead of strong tea. This is a negative transfer from colloquial Sudanese shaayahmar. The above table (4) shows that only 22 students out of 80 answered item 1 of the test correctly, most of the other 58 students' choices were due to transfer from the mother tongue (Arabic). The same is for item 2 in which only 25 students answered correctly whereas 55 students' answers were incorrect. This is also mostly attributed to

the transfer from the mother tongue. In item 8 of the test only 4 students answered correctly while 76 others answers were incorrect. Most of the incorrect choices were due to negative transfer as explained in the paragraph above. The point to be highlighted here is that the subjects in all of the above responses concerning items 1,2 and 8 trespass the fact that " what collocates in one language does not necessarily collocate in another"(Zughoul, 1991: 52). The choices mirror tension on the learner' part, between achieving accuracy of meaning and naturalness of patterning; i.e. they try to produce collocations that are typical in the English language while, at the same time, preserving the accurate literal meaning associated with the Arabic collocation(Baker, 1992:561). The total percentage of the students who answered the three items 1,2 and 8 correctly is only 21.2%. This explains the major role that the negative transfer from the mother tongue plays in difficulties of learning English collocations. It also validates my first hypothesis "The mother tongue interference plays the vital role in collocation difficulties."

Table (5)

5- He betrayed her love and _____ her heart .			
cracked	cut	Broke	bled
3	13	56	7
13- Do you have a good relationship _____ most of your relatives ?			
for	across	Around	with
16	7	8	49
14- My watch _____ , so I could not tell you the time .			
stopped	died	Slept	stood
64	5	7	3

Table (5/1) MotherTongue PositiveTransfer

Table 5 : Strategy: Mother Tongue Positive Transfer				
Questions	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
	Freq	Per	Freq	Per
5- He betrayed her love and _____ her heart .	56	70.0	23	28.7
13- Do you have a good relationship _____ most of your relatives ?	49	61.3	31	58.7
14- My watch _____ , so I could not tell you the time .	64	80.0	15	18.7
Total	70.4%		28.7%	

Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015)

L1 equivalence is a factor which causes L1 transfer. In other words, the similarity between L1 and L2 collocations lead to L1 positive transfer in the acquisition of L2 collocations, while the difference between them causes the negative transfer.

As shown in the results above the students who answered item 5 of the test correctly are 56 with a percentage of 70% of the total number of students. 23 didn't answer correctly(28.7%). It is observed that 49 students answered item 13 correctly and the rest of students(31) answered incorrectly. Concerning item 14 those who chose the correct answer were 64 students(80%)of the total number of students. What is common among the three items is that a big number of students chose the correct alternative. The strategy that the students resorted to here was the mother tongue transfer. The result of the transfer is positive this time 70.4% of the total number of students answered the three questions correctly.

Positive transfer occur when the target collocations match those in the L1. In item 5 the majority of students chose broke to collocate with her heart. The Arabic equivalent of broke her heart is kasaraqalbaha. They are congruent in both languages. In item 13 most of the students chose with to collocate with relationship. The relatively good performance in this question is due to the identical collocation of relationship with in Arabic (ʿalaqa maʿa) or (ʿalaqa bi). Item 14 reflects the positive transfer clearly 80% of the total number of students answered correctly. In the colloquial Sudanese Arabic the equivalent of my watch stopped is (saʿtiwaqafat) and in standard Arabic the equivalent is (tawaqfat al-saʿa). Caroli(1998) reported that participants resorted to their L1 (Italian) in selecting the English word that collocated whenever they lacked collocational knowledge in the L2, English. It was also noticed that collocations with the Italian literal equivalents were easier than those collocations with no Italian equivalents.

Table 6

4- You should not eat too much _____ it is not good for your health .			
quick food	rapid food	fast food	cold food
12	18	38	11
7- Some kinds of animals _____ for finding food .			
Immigrate	Migrate	Travel	go abroad
24	38	9	4
9- I'm sorry , I _____ forgot your birthday , please forgive me .			
Happily	Perfectly	Fully	Completely
9	16	12	40
15- Why are you giving me your broken computer ?I don't want it , it's _____ useless.			
Completely	Fully	Wholly	Loudly
40	14	12	13

Table 6/1 : Strategy: Synonymy

Questions	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
	Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.
4- You should not eat too much _____ it is not good for your health .	38	47.5	41	41.2
7- Some kinds of animals _____ for finding food .	38	47.5	37	47.2
9- I'm sorry , I _____ forgot your birthday , please forgive me .	40	50.0	37	47.2
15- Why are you giving me your broken computer ? I don't want it , it's _____ useless .	40	50.0	39	38.7
Total	48.7%		48.2%	

The Sudanese learners in the above items of the test 4,7,9 and15 were noticed to use synonymy strategy in dealing with English collocations. In the table above only 47.5% of the students have chosen the correct answer 'fast food ' in item 4. Most of students' deviant answers have resulted from the choice of synonyms of " fast"(rapid/quick). The same percentage of students answered item 7 correctly. Only 38 students out of 80 (47.5%) have chosen the correct answer migrate to collocate with animals in the above

table item 7. The others chose immigrate, travel and go abroad as they are synonymous. 30% of them (24 students) chose immigrate as shown in table 6, considering that migrate and immigrate are typical. In fact the only one that collocate with animals as general and birds specifically in our item is the verb migrate. The other choices collocate with people. In item 9 only 40 students chose the correct answer completely to collocate with forgot. The wrong choice of fully and perfectly is attributed to synonymy as they share

semantic meaning with completely. In item 15 of the test 40 students (50%) of the total number chose the correct answer completely. The source of the wrong choice of collocations is related to the strategy of synonymy that students resort to. They choose fully and wholly because both share a semantic property with fully. From the above results, it is clear that the students resorted to the synonymy strategy to choose the alternatives for the above items. In other words, they appeared to replace a word with another having a similar meaning. The total percentage of the students who answered the four items 4,7,9 and 15 correctly is only 48.7%. This explains the role that the synonymy as strategy plays in the difficulties of learning English collocations. Younis (2008) investigated

Sudanese EFL learners collocational knowledge and assessed the major causes of learners' collocational problems. Among these causes in his study are synonyms. According to many studies of L2 English collocation acquisition, synonymy has appeared to be a common learning strategy. The learners use an incorrect vocabulary item or structure which shares enough semantic features common with the desire item to overcome their poor knowledge of the appropriate collocate (Ellis, 1997: 60-1). In Farghal&Obiedat (1995), it was indicated that Arabic EFL learners greatly relied on the open-choice principle for word selection, replacing a word with its synonym. Such a strategy often led them to deviant, ungrammatical collocations in English.

Table 7

6- I look forward _____ hearing from you soon .			
for	from	To	in
21	11	38	8

Table 7/1: Strategy: Generalization

Questions	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
	Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.
6- I look forward _____ hearing from you soon .	38	47.5	40	50.0
Total	47.5%		50%	

Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015) As shown in the above table 7/1 only 38 students (47.5%) have chosen the correct answer to. The above result reveals that the preposition to followed by verb+ ing (hearing) carries a contrast to the testees. They put in mind the rule that to is followed by infinitive. The students who have chosen for and from, see them more likely to be followed by ing form. The strategy in which a certain TL feature , form or rule is expanded to a different contextual use in the TL

is overgeneralization. The low percentage of the students who achieved the correct answer in the above table show the negative influence of the overgeneralization strategy on their choice. Younis (2008) attributed the deficiency in the subjects' collocation knowledge to a number of reasons among which is overgeneralization. According to Zughol& Abdul-Fattah (2001), overgeneralization, i.e. the extension of the use of a certain L2 feature to another, has been found as a source of incorrect use of L2 English

collocations, and this strategy is viewed as a characteristic of learner language. The subjects in this study confused the words shame and

ashamed, thereby extending the use of ashamed, while the word shame was intended.

Table 8

3- Dave , come here and sit _____ next to me .			
below	on	down	under
11	8	55	6
12- she's rather worried _____ Khaled's studies .			
about	around	after	at
61	4	10	3

Table 8/1 :Everyday Language

Questions	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
	Freq	Per	Freq	Per
3- Dave , come here and sit _____ next to me .	55	68.8	25	31.2
12-She's rather worried _____ Khaled's studies .	61	76.3	17	21.2
Total	72.5%		26.2%	

Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015) In the above table (8) item 3 in the test, 55 students(68%) have chosen the correct answer down to collocate with sit. One way to explain the relatively high percentage of the correct rendering of the above can be attributed to the high frequency of using it. Students are exposed to it from the earlier stages of their learning English. Sit down is repeatedly used as class instruction. This what makes it familiar to students as 55 students 68.8% answered it correctly. This way the correctly produced collocations could have been acquired through exposure to language. Hajjawi(1991) tested the students' competence in collocating words correctly in English. The results showed that the subjects did relatively well in collocating words which are frequently used in daily life. In item

12 of the test the high percentage of those who answered correctly (76.3%) is due to the high frequency of using; don't worry about... in everyday life and the belief that these collocations may constitute indivisible entities and are thus learnt as linked pairs where one of the pairs immediately elicits its collocant. Siavosh. Hassan Abadi(1982) found that those collocations, which are more frequent in everyday speech, are easier to acquire than others. For example, in the item " Have a seat please." 80% of the participants selected the correct collocation.The average percentage of those who answered the above high frequency collocations correctly is 72.5%. This result indicates the easiness of everyday and frequently used collocations

Table 9

10- I think he works ____ the military hospital .			
during	at	upon	out
14	55	1	9
11- How long were you ____ the phone for ?don't you get tired of talking so much ?			
over	till	on	for
12	20	35	9

Table 9/1 : Strategy: Others

Questions	Correct answer		incorrect answer	
	Freq.	Per.	Freq.	Per.
10- I think he works ____ the military hospital .	55	68.8	24	30
11- How long were you ____ the phone for ?don't you get tired of talking so much ?	35	43.8	41	51.2
Total	56.5%		40.6%	

Prepared by researcher from applied study (2015)

On the basis of the result shown in table 9/1, item 10 there is a relatively little problem concerning English collocations. 55 students(68.8%) have chosen the correct preposition(at) to collocate with work. The relatively good result can be attributed to the rest of the alternatives(during, out, upon) which aren't logical and not acceptable to match with the rest of the sentence ..the military hospital. Work out has a different meaning as mentioned in Oxford Collocations Dictionary. It has the meaning of adverbs; beautifully, fine , perfectly, great, well. e. g. It all worked out as we planned. During tells when something happens not where. You always work at a place not during, upon or out a place. Students are also taught the preposition of place and time repeatedly. Only 35 students out of 80 have answered item 11 correctly. Most of the students haven't chosen the correct answer because they aren't familiar with the preposition **on** collocating with the

phone. In Arabic they use a preposition equivalent to in; (fi) to collocate with the telephone. Their different incorrect choices aren't justified. They only tell that because the testees aren't familiar with the correct response, they have chosen randomly.

Conclusion and Implications:

This paper adds to the few studies so far conducted in the area of lexical errors of foreign language learners in general and the errors of Sudanese learners of English in particular. It provides empirical data verifying the belief that collocations constitute an area of difficulty in learning English as a foreign language. The findings of this study support the claim that Sudanese-speaking students commit errors when producing collocations in English, especially the lexical combinations. Errors indicate that EFL students depend on interlingual and intralingual strategies to facilitate learning. Such strategies help in case of perceived linguistic similarities and lead to problems in case of differences.



Most of the incorrect lexical collocations found in this study were due to interlingual transfer from Arabic. Impetus to such transfer is given by the fact that the thirdsecondary school students have a relatively large stock of vocabulary. Hence they employ the interlingual transfer strategy whereby they replace the Arabic words with English ones. As a result, some collocations were produced correctly due either to positive interlingual transfer or direct acquisition from the language input.

As it is the case with errors in grammar and spelling, for example, there is no magic formula for correction of collocation errors. In addition to exposure to the language through reading and listening, learners of EFL could benefit from direct teaching and exercises aimed at raising awareness of collocations, (see Ellis, 1997; Williams, 2002). Depending on the students' cognitive development, simplified contrastive comparisons between English and Arabic collocations might help students see when to transfer and when not to. More exercises are needed that focus on all types of word-combinations. Matching tasks and collocation grids such as those suggested by Channell (1981) and Nation (1990) could be included and recycled in the curriculum.

In addition to direct teaching tasks, a bilingual list of collocations could be included in the course books. This is in line with the students' tendency to transfer collocations from Arabic as reflected by the interlingual errors discussed earlier. The glossaries of single words could be replaced by word combinations. Such bilingual lists of collocations might help in counteracting interlingual errors. They may show the students when to transfer from Arabic and when not to. They could also be a source of input for direct acquisition. Since collocations are fixed lexical units, as opposed to free single lexical items,

they could be listed with their Arabic equivalents at the end of each unit or at the end of each course book instead of the bilingual vocabulary lists. In addition to the monolingual collocation dictionaries (e.g. Benson et al, 1997; Hill and Lewis, 1997), bilingual English-Arabic and Arabic-English dictionaries of collocations are needed. Such dictionaries could be useful not only to the learners of English but also to English-Arabic-English translators.

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