

Investigating English Language Postgraduates' Knowledge in Using English Collocations

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ABSTRACT:

This study aimed at investigating English language postgraduates' knowledge in using English collocation by examining (80) M.A English language students to examine to what extent those students are aware of using English collocations in both lexical and grammatical collocations. A descriptive analytical method was used in the study. Data were collected through a diagnostic test for M.A students and were analyzed statistically by using (SPSS) program, in addition to an interview for English language teachers from different Sudanese universities. The findings showed that, M.A students are not sufficiently aware of using English collocations because university syllabi do not sufficiently cover English collocation. It's recommended that collocations should be integrated in university syllabus to raise students' awareness in using collocations and students should practice collocations seriously to master the language.

Keywords: Collocations, Collocational knowledge, Use of collocations

المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة لتقصي معرفة واستخدام المتلازمات اللفظية لدى طلاب الدراسات العليا باختبار ثمانين طالبا من طلاب ماجستير اللغة الانجليزية، بجامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا لمعرفة مدي المامهم بالمتلازمات اللفظية علي وجه الخصوص القواعدية والمعجمية منها. أُستخدم في هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي وُجمعت البيانات باستخدام اداتين هما الاختبار التشخيصي لطلاب ماجستير اللغة الانجليزية وقد تم تحليل البيانات المتحصل عليها عبر هذه الاداة احصائيا باستخدام الحزم الاحصائية للعلوم الانسانية بجانب هذا الاختبار لقد استخدم الباحث اداة المعاينة للاستاذه المختصين في مجال اللغة الانجليزية في مختلف الجامعات السودانية. وتوصلت الدراسة الي ان الطلاب لم يجيدوا استخدام المتلازمات اللفظية لعدم تغطية المنهج الجامعي لتلك المتلازمات. واوصت الدراسة بان تضمن المتلازمات اللفظية في المنهج الجامعي لرفع المستوى المعرفي للطلاب وعلي الطلاب ممارسة المتلازمات اللفظية بشكل جاد لإجادة اللغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المتلازمات اللفظية، معرفة المتلازمات اللفظية ، استخدام المتلازمات اللفظية .

INTRODUCTION:

Collocations have great importance in second and foreign language learning, they could be a guideline for students to know how far they make mistakes in collocating the word with other words, such as, 'I need to fix the problem' instead of 'to solve the problem'. The proper usage of collocation makes people understand the messages precisely and naturally. Collocations have been investigated by many researchers, but each researcher has considered them from a different dimension empirical studies about the knowledge of collocations among different groups of EFL or ESL learners show that when learners try to produce appropriate word combinations,

they face difficulties because they have not enough collocational knowledge. (Howarth, 1998). Based on these ancient scholars that, "*words do not exist in isolation, and they may differ according to the collocation in which they are used*" (Robins 1967). As cited in Namvar, (2012, p.43). It has been observed that learning words in isolation won't be useful for M.A English language students to master English collocations, it's important to know which words are collocated together to avoid confusion in using collocations. Hence, collocations can play an important role in the coherence and cohesion of language which can lead to overall mastery of English language.

Moreover, developing awareness of English collocation has great importance due to their efficient meaning and consciousness raising practice, based on texts will provide valuable clues to be used in further input as the process of learning language fluency, in addition to that, M.A English language students shouldn't only know the word-chunks, but also know lexical relation of words to distinguish the meaning and to use the language fluently and more accurately. In 1980s, Zhang was called the father of collocations because, he was the one who made the research about collocations although, and some teachers had already used the collocations in their teaching for EFL learners before they make their opinion about the collocations. The famous definition of collocations stated by Carter (1992) that "*collocations are group of words which occur repeatedly in a language*". This means that collocations are cluster of words which happen frequently in a language, and require to know which words are collocating together so as to use natural language. Diegnan (1998) defines collocation as "*collocation is the ways in which words regularly occur near each other*". This means that, it's important to know which words regularly occur near each other so that your language will be understood by others and to be more native-like. It has been observed from the definitions above, collocations are co-occurrence of words together, native speakers can use them easily in both written and spoken discourse due to the large number of store words in their minds, on the other hand M.A English language students should know which words are collocated together in order to avoid confusion in using the language fluently and native-like. In fact, learners who only acquire individual words will not achieve native-like competence in vocabulary learning. In other words, their collocational

knowledge seems to be very limited. Consequently, when students move to advance levels they can't use collocations accurately and so, they fail to communicate their meanings. The present study aims to investigate English language postgraduates' knowledge in using English collocations by examining the errors that are made by M.A in using collocations. For example, they say "she has got yellow hair" instead of "blond hair", (yellow is used with colour and flowers), drink cigarette instead of smoking cigarette, it's possible to say take a picture, while make a picture is strange. Likewise, heavy rain is a perfect match, while thick rain is awkward, do nothing is fine, but make nothing is unnatural, high temperature is possible but tall temperature is shocking.

The study will provide answers to the following questions:

1- To what extent do M.A English language students aware of using English collocations in promoting their fluency in language?

2- What are the types of collocation errors often made by M.A English language students?

The study has the following hypotheses:

1-M.A English language students are unaware of using English collocations in promoting their fluency in language.

2- There are various types of collocation errors made by M.A English language students.

Objectives of the study:

The study tries to realize the following objectives:

1- To show to what extent are M.A English language students aware of using English collocations in developing their accuracy in using language.

2- To investigate different types of collocation errors those are often made by M.A English language students to enhance their accuracy in language.

REVIEW RELATED LITERATURE:

The study of Asma (2015) is one of the related studies on English collocation. The study investigated the Sudanese EFL undergraduates' knowledge and use of collocations. It discussed the effect of knowledge in using collocations at the undergraduates' level, Sudan University of Science and Technology. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method as a research methodology. Two data collection tools were used; these were completion test for undergraduate students and a questionnaire for English language teachers at Sudan University of Science and Technology. The study came out with the following results, limited knowledge and unawareness of using collocations by the students, the deviant answers collected from the test illustrate the learners' confusion over the use of lexical and grammatical collocations, students' errors provided evidence in favour of introducing the teaching of collocations, the study recommended that, EFL teachers should raise awareness of the significance of collocations and faster collocational competence among their students, EFL teachers should provide examples of collocational differences between L1 and L2, particularly collocations without an equivalent in L1, EFL teachers should encourage their students to use dictionary which provides good courage of using collocations. Similar study about collocation is the study of Omya (2011). Assessing English collocational knowledge among Sudanese EFL university students. The present study attempts to investigate knowledge of collocation because it is a problematic area for second or foreign language learners. The study comes out with constructive recommendations for both teachers and learners in order to improve the process of teaching and learning the language. The samples of the study are one hundred and fifty students drawn from second, third, and fourth year majoring in English from Khartoum university, Faculty of Arts.

Collocations test of (50) items were used to collect data; the data have been statistically analyzed by using Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings of the study indicated that, the subjects' knowledge of collocations is poor. Results of the statistical analysis indicated that, there is a significant difference in students' knowledge of collocations among the three levels. It revealed that "adjective-noun" is the easiest, while "verb-noun" is the most difficult one. Based on the research findings, the study recommends that. Teachers should enable students to be aware of collocations through making more emphasis on collocations while teaching. This study is different from the previous one by focusing on lexical collocations "adjective-noun" and "verb-noun", while the previous one focused on both lexical and grammatical collocations. The study of Abdulnasir (2011) focused on the impact of vocabulary awareness on developing EFL learners' writing skills. The researcher highlighted the importance of mastering vocabulary items in order to initiate and identify the purpose of their writing tasks, to collect the data of the study; the researcher designed two questionnaires for teachers and students of English in secondary schools. He constructed two reading and writing tests as well. The researcher came out with the following findings that, teachers didn't equip students with techniques and procedures for developing broad and varied vocabulary for their writing ability, the syllabus didn't emphasize vocabulary instruction to improve writing. It also didn't provide sufficient writing activities to motivate vocabulary learning, students didn't assess their own vocabulary and they didn't practice learning new words in classrooms or outside. Besides, they lacked of syntactic and semantic prosperities of individual lexical items. This study in contrast to the previous ones, it focused mainly on vocabulary awareness to develop writing tasks, it's better to show the word chunks and how vocabulary could be used together to enhance writing tasks.

The study of Boonyas (2005) about collocation violations in translation of business article. The aim is to study the violate in translation of business article. The result of the study revealed that, the informants' ability in translating business texts from Thai into English, with effective use of collocations was as a low level. Both lexical and grammatical collocations were problematic for the informants. The data showed that, the informants were not aware of collocations when translating a Thai text into English. The major source of violations was learners' mother-tongue interference and deficiency of collocational knowledge. It is different from other studies because it focused on translation of collocations in business articles, but it highlighted on both grammatical and lexical collocation errors which are made by EFL students, in addition to the negative impact played by mother tongue interference in using English collocations. The current study is different from the previous ones, because it focuses on the relationship between collocations knowledge and language accuracy. Native speakers have ability to speak more clearly and efficiently in contrast to language learners, due to many reasons explain by Hill (2000) that, the vast range of ready-made chunks that native speakers store in their minds enable them to process and produce language at much greater speed. When they listen or read, they recognize these chunks as units rather than processing everything word by word. The same idea has been supported by Pawley and Syder (1983) who suggest that native speakers store more words both, individually, and in language chunks, in order to achieve native-like. On the other hand, Nation (2001) who argues that, language knowledge is collocations knowledge due to the store of language –chunks in a long term memory that forms the basis of

learning collocation and use. Moreover, The same idea has been supported by Ellis (2005) language learning and use can be accounted by association between sequences of words, without referring to grammatical rules. Furthermore, Brown (1974) believes that oral production, listening comprehension and reading speed can be improved through an increase of their collocations knowledge. learners need to do the same thing store units of language, at phrase or clause length as same as chunks in memory. Moreover, Lewis (1997) adds that, prefabricated chunks allow learners to use expressions that they were unable to construct creativity from rules. This can ease frustration, promote motivation, and fluency. Furthermore, Hill (2000) emphasizes on the importance of collocations knowledge in relation to developing accuracy of expression. Learners often use language labored, clumsy sentences in both, speech and writing, because they are unable to express complex ideas lexically. In many cases unnatural sentences or phrases they produce, can be replaced by collocations. For example, 'his disability will continue until he dies'. This could be avoided if the learner learns some adjectives that are collocated with disability, such as, mental, physical, permanent, and intellectual. In this case, the learner has to say 'a permanent disability' instead of the previous sentence. On the other hand, Benson et al. (1997) shows that learners of English as a foreign language or second language, like learners of any other languages that traditionally devoted themselves in mastering words, their pronunciation, forms, and meanings. However, if they wish to express themselves fluently and accurately in both, speech and writing, they should learn to cope with collocations or combination of words into phrases, sentences and texts.

On the other hand, Ellis (2005 p:128) states that *"Speaking natively is speaking idiomatically using frequent and familiar collocations, and the job of the language learner is to learn these familiar word sequences. That native speakers have done, this is demonstrated not only by the frequency of these collocations in the language, but also by the fact that conversational speech is broken into 'fluent units' of complete grammatical clauses of four to ten words, uttered at or faster than normal rates of articulation"*. It's clear that, knowledge of collocations is important for developing both frequency and accuracy in English language. So, learners should learn English collocations as well as idiomatic expressions frequently in conversational speech so as to make fluency in using the language.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

1- Research Method:

This study is conducted through an analytical descriptive method as an appropriate way of investigating English language postgraduates' knowledge in using English collocations.

2-Participants:

The sample of this study is selected randomly from the population. The sample of the study consists of (80) M.A English language graduate students drawn from both, male and female, for Academic year 2018-2019 at Sudan University of Science and Technology, College of Languages.

3-Tools for Data Collection:

In this study two tools were utilized to collect data. A test was used for M.A English language students, Sudan University of Science and Technology. It analyzed statistically by using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) besides utilizing an interview for teachers of English language drawn from different Sudanese universities.

Students' diagnostic test is the first tool of the study which consists of two questions, each question has different multiple choices to find out to what extent are M.A English language students able to deal with English collocations and the types of collocation errors made by them. The first question consists of ten items, each item has one correct answer, it consists of matching the two parts of collocations, and the second question consists of ten items, each item has one correct answer, it consists of multiple choice questions (a, b, c, or d). Test was administrated randomly to (80) M.A English language students, Sudan University of Science and Technology, College of Languages.

The second tool utilized for collecting qualitative data in this study was an experts' interview. It's randomly distributed to (10) English language teachers from different Sudanese universities. The interviewees expressed their viewpoints on the errors that are made by M.A students to make accuracy in using English collocations.

3.1 Statistical Validity and Reliability for Students' Test

The first draft of a test was presented to the supervisor who checked it in addition to Ph.D. holders and assistant professors who helped in proof reading and reviewing. The reliability calculated was analyzed by using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS). The reliability coefficient was calculated for the measurement, which was used in the test using Alpha - Cronbach coefficient Equation as the following: For calculating the validity and the reliability of the test from the above equation, the researcher distributed the test to respondents to calculate the reliability coefficient using the Alpha-Cronbach coefficient and the results have been showed in the following table:

Reliability Statistics:

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of questions
.87	2

Validity and reliability are important aspects of a test, and this will ensure the quality of the instrument which is used throughout this study. The result in the

table above shows that the reliability coefficients for the test is (.87) This indicates that the test is characterized by good reliability and validity and makes statistical analysis acceptable.

Table 1 shows the overall statistical percentage of the first hypothesis.

Question	N	Mean	SD	t-value	DF	p-value
2	80	2.8	1.4	7.7	79	0.00
Overall percentage	Pass		Fail		Decision	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>		
	16	20%	64	80%	Accepted	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

1-Students' Test Results

The table (1) above illustrates that, there are (16) of the respondents with percentage of (20%) answered the statements correctly, while, (64) of the respondents with percentage of (80%) failed to answer the statements correctly. It's clear that the number of the respondents who failed to answer the statements is higher than those who succeeded in answering all the statements correctly. The calculated value of T-TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the second question was (7.7) which is greater than the tabulated value of T-TEST

at the degree of freedom (79) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (2.34). This indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents. This means that the first hypothesis which was (M.A English language students are aware of using English collocations in promoting their fluency in language), is accepted. Hence, it's clear that due to this result M.A English language students are unaware of using English collocations accurately, so the hypothesis has been accepted.

Table 2 : the overall statistical percentage of the second hypothesis.

Question	N	Mean	SD	t-value	DF	p-value
4	80	6.2	4.2	15.6	79	0.00
Overall percentage	Pass		Fail		Decision	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>		
	25	31%	55	69%	Accepted	

Based on the results shown in the table No (2) there are (25) of the respondents with percentage of (31%) answered the statements correctly, while (55) of the respondents with percentage of (69%) failed to answer the statements correctly. It's clear that the number of the respondents who failed to answer the statements is greater than those who succeeded in answering the statements correctly. The calculated value of T-TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the fourth question was (15.6) which is greater than the tabulated value of T-TEST at the degree of freedom (79) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (2.34). This indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents. This means that, the second hypothesis which was (There are various types of collocation errors made by M.A English language students) accepted. The second tool of the study is an interview for English language teachers drawn exclusively from different Sudanese universities.

2- Results of the Interview:

The interview was conducted to investigate English language postgraduates' knowledge in using English collocations by examining the knowledge of students and the source of errors that are made by postgraduate students on the following variables:

A-To what extent are English collocations sufficiently covered in a university syllabus? B-To what extent does university syllabus provide appropriate strategies for learning all types of English collocations?.

With regard to the first variable dealing with the question (To what extent are English collocations sufficiently cover university syllabus?). All the interviewees agreed that collocations are not sufficiently covered in the university syllabus, they also agreed that collocations are taught as a part of English semantics with less emphasis on them, this indicates that, lack of sufficiently

teaching collocations at university syllabus is the main reason for students' difficulties in using English collection, , one of the interviewees adds that, it's hardly realized any mentioning of them. Another interviewee has raised very important issue is that collocations should be taught in different contexts to raise students' awareness in using them. This shows that the first hypothesis (M.A English language students are unaware of using English collocations in promoting their fluency in language) is approved by the experts' views mentioned above.

According to a variable of the second question (to what extent does university syllabus provide appropriate strategies for learning all types of English collocations?), the results obtained from the interview show that, all the interviewees proved that the syllabus doesn't provide sufficient strategies for students to learn all types of English collocations, one of interviewees adds that, there are some optional courses at the advanced levels, but aren't taught regularly. The results mentioned above obviously supported the second hypothesis which was (There are various types of collocation errors made by M.A English language students), are attributed to the fact that Students make errors because university syllabus has insufficient strategies for learning collocations.

CONCLUSIONS:

It has been observed that from the statistical results of the test and different ideas form experts of English language teachers shown above that, collocations represent a problematic area for M.A English language students in using the language accurately due to the fact that, they are unaware of using both grammatical and lexical collocations which represent the major parts of English collocations, they made errors because they don't know which adjectives are collocated with nouns, which nouns are collocated with verbs,

which nouns are collocated with prepositions, which adjectives are collocated with prepositions, and which nouns are collocated with prepositions. Therefore, knowledge of collocations is knowledge of language, using collocations properly means using the language accurately so great efforts should be exerted by students to master English collocation so as to enhance their fluency in language. Based on the findings of this study, the following points are recommended:

1-Syllabus designers should include collocations in university syllabus in order to raise students' awareness of using English collocations.

2- Practicing English collocations seriously is the best way for students to use collocations properly and to add more flavor in their language usage.

3-M.A English language students should be aware of both grammatical and lexical collocations, in addition to other different patterns of English collocations.

4-University teachers should pay attention in teaching English collocations and encourage students to learn them.

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