Exploring the Difficulties Encountered by Postgraduates in Using English Collocations

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ABSTRACT:

This study aimed at exploring collocational difficulties encountered by English language Graduate Students in using English collocation at Sudan University of Science and Technology. A descriptive analytical method was used. Data were collected through a diagnostic test for (80) M.A English language students at Sudan University of Science and Technology (SUST) and analyzed statistically by using (SPSS) program. The findings showed that M.A English language students face difficulties in using English collocations due to many factors among them are the interference of mother tongue and learning words in isolation. It was recommended that students should learn words in chunks and avoid thinking in mother tongue while speaking English language.

Keywords: Difficulties - Exploring - interference of mother tongue – post- graduates.

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الي استكشاف الصعوبات التي تواجه طلاب الدراسات العليا في اِستخدام المتلازمات اللفظية.استخدم في هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، وقد جُمعت البيانات باستخدام الاختبار التشخيصي لثمانين طالبا من طلاب ماجستير اللغة الانجليزية جامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا. وحُلِلت البيانات احصائياً.وتوصلت الدراسة الي عدة نتائج اهمها ان طلاب ماجستير اللغة الانجليزية يواجهوا صعوبات في استخدام المتلازمات اللفظية بسبب تداخل اللغة الام وتعلم الكلمات بشكل مفرد ليس متطابق. واوصت الدراسة بان يتجنب الطلاب تعلم الكلمات بشكل مفرد وعدم التفكير في اللغة الام اثناء تحدث اللغة الانجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصعوبات– استكشاف – تداخل اللغة الام – طلاب الدراسات العليا

INTRODUCTION:

English language is widely used for communication among people from different countries and cultures all over the world.

One of the most difficult tasks of foreign and second language learners is appropriately combining words in second and foreign language. Native speakers have a good knowledge about which words can go together and how to use diverse words. Having such knowledge is one of the vital competencies of native speakers. These combinations of words are called "collocations". Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2005:p293) defines collocation as "a combination of words in a language that happens very often and more frequently than would happen by chance: 'responding success' and 'crying shame' are English collocations". Moreover, a collocation is the combination of two words or more to create a meaning which is different from the meaning of the separate words. Sinclair (1991, p: 170) defines collocations as "the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text". A clear and well phrased definition is presented by Lewis (1997, p: 44) who explains that" collocations are those combinations of words which occur naturally with greater than random frequency ". Hence, collocations refer to words which are combined together. Moreover, Aghbar (1990) states that "collocation consists of two words which are linked together in the memory of native speakers and occur together with some frequency in both written and oral discourse". This means that collocations are made up of two expressions which are connected together in the memory of native speakers that can be used regularly in written and spoken language easily.

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Any words combinations that don't exhibit frequent co-occurrence are not classified as collocations. For example, "blonde hair" is a collocation, but "black hair" is not normally categorized as a collocation. The proper usage of collocation is crucial to sound like a native speaker but it's not so easy for non-native speakers of a target language. Hill (2000:P35) states that "collocation is an important vocabulary aspect that helps learners use words more fluently and proficiently". This co-occurrence of words together will help advanced university students to speak and write English in a more natural and accurate way. Evidently, knowledge of collocations is an essential and integral part of vocabulary acquisition that contributes significantly to the second language acquisition. The knowledge of collocations has been widely recognized as an important aspect in language learning, the appropriate usage of collocations enables the learners to speak more fluently, make their speech more comprehensible and help them to produce more native-like utterances. Therefore, it plays a very important role in enhancing English fluency and accuracy. On the other hand, there are many theories in cognitive psychology that support the positive role of learning collocation in improving language fluency. Raupach (1984) pointed out that "collocations or 'language chunks' serve as automatized resources that allow for fluency in production and faster processing. With a good storage of 'chunks' and the released attention mechanisms in processing these chunks, a complex language task may be easier to complete". In other words, language fluency is more likely to be the outcome. Native speakers can express their thoughts rapidly and fluently because they have a huge stock of ready-made chunks available to be used. They believed that mastering collocations or word chunks play a positive role in improving English language fluency. Therefore, Collocations are considered to be a problematic area in second and foreign language learning. They have always been a troublesome for advanced university students to use collocations properly and accurately, they may have acquired a huge of vocabulary, but they still lack collocational knowledge, and they still producing unnatural language. According to Nattinger and DeCarrio(1992 p:104) state that "vocabulary learning is more than the study of individual words". In facts, 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 advanced levels, they can't use collocations accurately and so, they fail to communicate their meanings. The present study aims to focus on difficulties encountered by M.A English language students in using English collocations.

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1- To what extent do M.A English language students face difficulties in using collocations?

2- What are the reasons behind the lack of M.A English language students' knowledge in using collocations to enhance their language fluency?

For the purpose of investigating these study questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1- M.A English language students face difficulties in using collocations to enhance their fluency in language.

2- There are many reasons behind the lack of M.A English language students' knowledge in using English collocations.

Objectives of the Study:

The primary goal of this study is to explore collocational difficulties encountered by English language graduate students in using collocations so as to raise their awareness in this field.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

One of the related studies on lexical semantic relation specifically collocation is conducted by Yousuf (2004). He investigates the actual use of lexical semantic relations to promote teaching vocabulary at the third grade, secondary level in Khartoum locality schools, Sudan. Many tools are used in this study to collect data; a questionnaire is developed to collect data from secondary school teachers and observation check list, a pre/post tests and structured interview are used to collect data from students in the classrooms, in addition to a text book evaluation is carried out to investigate the actual use of lexical semantic relations contained in the text book. He observes that due to his long experience of teaching English language that, many students fail to write good compositions because of lack of the appropriate vocabulary. Therefore, he thinks that using lexical semantic relation could encourage students to build up a plentiful supply of words. Otherwise, interviewed students found that some semantic relations are exciting. It's concluded that teachers' attitudes towards teaching English vocabulary are positive in general, and teachers' attitudes don't correlate with what of students think of. Neither the teachers' book nor the students' book has mentioned anything about how to use semantic relations in building vocabulary to enable students to strengthen their language competence. Similar study about collocation is the study of Mohamed (2016) which displays difficulties and problems that face Sudanese EFL students in learning English collocations. The sample of the study involved eighty secondary school students; the researcher adapted multiple choice test for students. It was meant to evaluate the grammatical performance of Sudanese EFL students on both lexical and grammatical collocations which proposed by Benson & IL son (1997). The findings of this study confirmed that Sudanese EFL students face difficulties in using collocations, with regard to the poor result of both lexical and grammatical collocations as well as various strategies, negative transfer, synonyms and overgeneralization that students resorted to. They recommended that all points that were mentioned above should be considered in order to enhance the process of teaching and learning English collocations in Sudan. It has been observed that from the studies above both of them focus on enhancing the process of learning English collocations, the first study is tackled the importance of lexical semantic relations in writing composition for secondary school students, this will help them to master the language by using various co-occurrence of words which organize the text in terms of cohesion and coherence of text, while the second study tackled the issue of mastering grammatical and lexical collocations so as to help them to use the language properly. In contrast to a study conducted by Almela (2007) which is about words as "lexical unit" in learning and teaching vocabulary. The aim was to bring EFL research in line with current issues in lexical semantics by discussing some of the implications of collocational research for understanding of vocabulary learning process and the design of teaching method. The researcher argued that learners would need to carry many processes when encountered with actual communicative situations so as to decide which combination of word sense is the most coherent one by suggesting that, this operational complexity can be drastically minimized if the more stable and cohesive word co-occurrence have been learnt as a whole. In other words, learning collocations instead of words in isolation is more retrieval and recognition of the former that makes the process simpler and faster. This idea is similar with the idea in terms of learning lexical units and co-occurrence of words and their role in organizing the text, but defers in concluding that idiomatic patterning constitute the most efficient language level for promoting fluency and facilitating communicative success in EFL learning.

Other related study about collocation is the study of Fan (2009) investigating and exploratory study of collocational used by EFL students A task- based approach. The study attempted from the perspective of L2 learners to have a deeper understanding of collocation use, and some of problems involved by adapting a task based approached using two highly comparable corpora based on writing of Hong Kong ESL and British Students. The result of the study indicated that, the performance of Hong Kong students in collocational usage might be adversary affected by L1 and L2 as well as their inadequacy in the lexis and grammar of the target language. The findings of the study suggested the need for the broader view of collocational knowledge and a pedagogical approach in learning and teaching of this aspect of L2. This study differs from the previous ones in terms of mother tongue interference but it has the same idea of broader view of collocatioanl knowledge in helping EFL Students to master the language. The current study defers from all studies in exploring of collocatioal difficulties in encountered by graduate students majoring in English. Collocations play an important role in vocabulary acquisition, because knowing a word is definitely much more than simply knowing, what it means. According to Nation (1990) lists eight elements, which are necessary to have complete knowledge of a word, these elements are; spoken form, written form, grammatical behavior, collocational behavior, frequency, Conceptual meaning, Stylistic register constraints, and word associations. In the field of lexical approach, collocational patterns are considered to be the core of word knowledge, as states by Morgan Lewis (2000p:14) argues that, increasing the learners' collocational competence is the way to improve their language as a whole, the reason is that, many students aren't making any perceived progress is simply because, they haven't been trained to noticed which words go with which. They may know quite a lot of individual words which they struggle to use, along with their grammatical knowledge, but they lack the ability to use those words in arrange of collocations which pack more meaning into what they say or write. Learning collocations isn't only increasing the mental lexicon, but to develop language fluency as well. Moreover, Michael Lewis (1997p:15) says, *"Fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items, which are available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity"*. It has been observed that storing a large number of vocabulary doesn't help EFL/ESL learners to master the language unless to know which words are collocated together.

METHODOLOGY

1-Research Method:

This study is conducted through an analytical descriptive method as an appropriate way of an exploration into the difficulties encountered by M.A students in using English collocations.

2-Participants:

The sample of this study is selected randomly from the study population. The sample of the study consists of (80) M.A English language graduate students from both, male and female, Sudan university of science and technology, college of languages.

3-Instruments:

Instruments of a study are the tools for the required data of the study. In this study a test was utilized to collect data. It was used for M.A English language students, Sudan University of Science and Technology.

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3.1 Students' diagnostic Test:

Students' test is a tool of the study which consists of two questions, each question has different multiple choices to explore collocational difficulties encountered by English language graduate students in using English collocations. The first question consists of ten items, each item has one correct answer, it consists of choosing the correct collocation to complete the sentences, the second question consists of ten items, each item has one correct answer, and it consists of complete each sentence with an appropriate word. The test administrated randomly to (80) M.A English language students, Sudan university of science and technology, College of languages.

3.2 Statistical Validity and Reliability for Students' Test

The first draft of a test was presented to 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
1	80	3.7	0.3	6.8	79	0.00
Overall percentage	Pass		Fail		Decision	
	Frequency	*Percentage*	*frequency*	*Percentage*		
	19	36%	51	64%	**Accepted**	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

In the light of the final findings in the table No (1) shown above that, there are (19) of the respondents with percentage of (36%) answered the statements correctly, while, (51) of the respondents with percentage of (64%) 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 respondent's answers in the first question was (6.8)

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 is no statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents. This indicates to the

acceptance of the hypothesis related to this part. The result of the first hypothesis which was (M.A English language students face difficulties in using English collocations to enhance their fluency in language) is accepted.

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

Question	N	Mean	SD	t-value	DF	p-value
2	80	3.4	1.5	8.0	79	0.00
Overall percentage	**Pass**		**Fail**			**Decision**
	Frequency	*Percentage*	*frequency*	*Percentage*		
	36	45%	44	55%		**Accepted**

With reference to the statistical table No (1.2) the results show that, there are (36) of the respondents by (45%) responded the statements correctly, in contrast to (44) of the respondents with percentage of (55%) failed to respond them. 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 respondent's answers in the third question was (8.0) 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 the second hypothesis which was (There are many reasons behind the lack of M.A English language students' knowledge in using collocations to develop their language fluency) is accepted.

CONCLUSIONS:

From above results, it's crystal clear that M.A English language students face

difficulties in using English collocations as stated in the statistical results shown above, in the first hypothesis students face difficulties in using English collocations, they don't know which words collocate together due to many reasons as stated in the second hypothesis such as, mother tongue interference has a negative impact in using English collocations, learning words in isolation not in chunks plays a negative role in using collocations, in addition to non-specific rules of English collocations and de-lexicalized of verbs.

In the light of the findings of the study, it's recommended that:

1) M.A English language students should familiarize themselves to utilize collocations properly.

2) M.A students should learn words in chunks not in isolation to avoid confusion in using English collocations.

3) Syllabus designers should integrate collocations to a university syllabus in order to raise students' awareness in using English collocations.

4) M.A students should avoid thinking in mother tongue while speaking English.

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