

# The Significance of Collocational Knowledge to Learners in EFL Classes

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**Abstract:** It is widely acknowledged that collocation is an indispensable aspect of language learning, and it is accepted that language is acquired faster and more efficiently when learned in set phrases and chunks in EFL classes ( Ellis 2001, Nation 2001, Lewis 2000, Pawley and Syder 1983, Brown 1974 ). Hence, teaching English collocations to EFL learners and raising their awareness will enhance their English language collocational competence in listening, speaking, reading as well as writing.

**Key words:** collocational competence, raising awareness, EFL, learners.

## 1.Introduction

With the globalization of the world economy, politics, and culture as well as education, English has been widely spoken in China. However, most Chinese students have found that it is not easy to speak English as native speakers. As a matter of fact, there have been a wide range of approaches to language learning ( Richards & Rodgers 2001, Jesa 2008 ). Among all the methodologies, researchers have attached great importance to collocational learning, but sometimes collocation has been neglected ( Schmitt 2000 ). As we know, at times grammar and pronunciation are at the core of language learning, while vocabulary is neglected in most foreign language classes ( Fernández, Prahlad, Rubtsova, & Sabitov 2009 ). Anyway, year by year, nowadays it's accepted that collocation learning is one of the essential elements in the acquisition of both one's native language and of learning a foreign language ( Morra & Camba 2009 ). Therefore, it is believed that having large and varied collocations is the indicator of communicative competence and it is important to have a good command of collocations in language learning ( McCarten 2007, Zu 2009 ).

## 2.Literature Review

According to Benson et al. ( 1985 ), collocations are arbitrary and unpredictable" and that makes it difficult for non-native speakers to cope with them. Despite the arbitrary nature of collocations, it is recommended by many other researchers that teachers should motivate their students to learn collocations.

According to Cowie ( 1992 ), English collocation is important in receptive as well as productive language competence. Similar assertion was made by Carter and McCarthy ( 1988 ). In their opinion, English collocations are useful not only for English comprehension but for English production. They claimed that by memorizing collocational groups, students would have the idea about certain lexical restrictions. Most importantly, "collocations teach students expectations about which sorts of language can follow from what has preceded. Students will not have to go about reconstructing the language each time they want to say something but instead can use these collocations as pre-packaged

building blocks" ( Carter & McCarthy,1988, p. 75 ). Moreover, it can be said that "collocation has emerged as an important category of lexical patterning and it is fast becoming an established unit of description in language teaching courses and materials" ( Woolard, 2000, p.28 ). Liu ( 2000 ) also stated that the more often students are taught English collocations, the more correctly students can make use of collocations.

Hence the significance of collocations in Foreign Language Acquisition has been stressed and considered a lot ( Maghsodi 2010, McCarten 2007, Ellis 2001, Nation 2001, Lewis 2000, Pawley and Syder 1983, Brown 1974 ). Many researchers have stressed the importance of collocations in language learning. Brown ( 1974 ) suggested that learning collocations improves the learner's oral and writing proficiency, listening comprehension and reading speed. In addition, she argued that we speak and write in chunks and learning collocations helps learners observe how native speakers in both spoken and written contexts use language chunks. Moreover, Brown ( 1974 ) has contended that this knowledge helps language learners use these expressions themselves. According to Brown, together with context and concept, collocations should be included when we teach advanced learners new words because of their crucial significance in language learning. Like Brown ( 1974 ), Lewis ( 2001 ) stated that learning chunks of words helps language learners develop their communicative competencies better than learning words in isolation. Along the same lines, Pawley and Syder ( 1983 ) pointed out that collocations play a significant role in language learning. They lead to the improvement of language competence. Therefore, Pawley and Syder ( 1983 ) argued that the more fixed expressions, including collocations, language learners use in useful basic chunks, the more they produce native-like language structures. What's more, Ellis ( 2001 ) announced that direct instruction for collocations is significant in language learning because they represent an important aspect of EFL learners' vocabulary development. Furthermore, some researchers like Nation ( 2001 ) argued that knowing a word involves knowing the words that co-occur with it. In addition, he emphasized that collocations are parts of the reception and production of vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, collocations should be taught to language learners to

be able to produce the target language appropriately (Nation, 2001). Similarly, Laufer (1988) argued that collocations help in many levels of the development of vocabulary development, which she considers a crucial aspect in vocabulary learning.

### 3. Conclusion

Vocabulary plays an important role in communication as well as the other components of language. In our opinion the lack of needed vocabulary is one of the most common causes of students' inability to express themselves in English in EFL classes. Students cannot use English outside the classroom in real life situations in spite of studying English for years. Also, they have serious problems in finding suitable collocations mostly because of the differences between the word order in Chinese and English. For instance, a majority of EFL learners in China are usually incompetent in writing, mis-collocations are widespread in their writing, and their words are associated inappropriately. The present study showed the contribution of collocational knowledge to all four language skills as collocation mostly contributed to speaking, listening, reading and writing respectively. Therefore, learning vocabulary, especially collocations play an important role in foreign language learning and four language skills (Ellis 2001, Brown 1974, Pawley & Syder 1983). Therefore, many researchers claimed that one of the important factors in English language learning is to raise awareness of collocations (Maghsodi 2010, McCarten 2007, Ellis 2001, Nation 2001, Lewis 2000, Pawley and Syder 1983, Brown 1974). Furthermore, Ebrahimi Bazzaz & Abd Samad (2011) regard collocations as "a vital characteristic of vocabulary knowledge and state that what should be offered to students is collocational knowledge not individual words". To sum up, EFL teachers in China should give importance to learning collocations because it is necessary for designing suitable teaching resources and for the methodology of classroom instruction.

We strongly believe that this study may be helpful for teachers and students in terms of becoming familiarized with a comparatively new technique which will be helpful in their vocabulary development.

### 4. Suggestion

Based on the discussion of the present study, one suggestion for the future research is put forward. Due to time limitation, the researcher did not launch any methodology to conduct the research, just rely on discussions. Therefore, future research could validate the research findings by adopting questionnaire, interview and observation to make it more academic.

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