

# A Source Based Analysis of Lexical Collocation Errors among Iraqi Teachers of English

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## **Abstract**

*In everyday life usage of language, people use collocations in their written as well as spoken language. Collocations are very important to produce correct and understandable language, thus collocations became the main concern of many researches. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate lexical collocational errors, made by Iraqi EFL teachers . The sample of the study includes (20) teachers of English secondary schools in Diyala governorate/Baqubah district, distributed on two groups (10) each. The data was collected systematically via recording the teachers' lectures on different topics for over 60 lectures, each of one hour long, then analyzing the data to shed light on the problems they were constantly confronted with. Lexical collocation errors were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to trace the fundamental barriers related to such inevitable errors, and thus suggested some ways to brace those teachers' collocational knowledge. The study reached the conclusions that those mistakes are committed due to the negative effect of the mother tongue and the lack of sufficient information about the correct collocations that should be used in English language, in addition to the teachers' concentration on the scientific material rather than the language used.*

**Key words:** Lexical Collocation, Errors, Iraqi Teachers.

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## **Introduction**

The concept of collocation has been tackled by different scholars such as Martynska (2004), Seretan & Wehrli (2006) and Meyer (2009) in addition to many researchers . Collocation as a term is defined in the Cambridge dictionary of as " a word or phrase that is often used with another word or phrase, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives, but might not be expected from the meaning":

In "a hard frost", 'hard' collocates with 'frost' but 'strong' does not collect with 'frost'. It is unacceptable to put strong instead of hard though they have a somehow similar meaning.

This study hypothesis that Iraqi teachers of English, as a foreign language, in Iraq commit semantic collocational errors during the process of teaching their students.

## **Related Literature**

A number of researches in the field of searching for the errors committed by teachers of English all around the world. Iraqi teachers are part of these teachers and normally they commit mistakes and errors while teaching,

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therefore they have been targeted by a number of researchers in order to assign the reasons behind these errors such as Seretan & Wehrli (2006) , Kurosaki (2012) and Lu (2017).

### **Aims of the Study:**

The current study aims at assigning, studying and analyzing the lexical collocational errors committed by Iraqi teachers of English, as a foreign language, in Iraq. It sheds light on the sources of these errors, whether cognitive or communicational, in order to be able to find the right solutions to overcome this problem.

## **Literature Review**

### **1.On the Concept of Collocation**

The term 'collocation' is taken from Latin word 'collocare' , referring to the to arrange or to set in order (Martynska, 2004:2). The British linguist Firth was the first one who introduced this term to refer to the habitual co-occurrence of lexical items (Firth, 1957:196). Any collocation should have a core or main word and a collocutor that must come hand in hand with it. (Devenyi, 2004:1).

Matthews (2003: 530) defines collocation as the relationship among specific lexical parts within the syntactic unit, for example: the lexical item blond cobbles with the lexical item hair as in blond hair, while computer cobbles with the word hate as in this example: my car hates me.

On his part, Meyer (2009:223) defines collocation as those words which generally happen along just like the sentence I strongly agree. It is composed of two lexical items: strongly and agree. They commonly collocate in such contexts. Some expressions are used to express opinions, like disagree or dislike, might follow strongly, but are less commonly used than does the lexical item agree.

Collocation forms a unit consisting of a sequence of integrative words, but not the same way as idioms do, and sometimes this sequence encompasses a linguistic unity. For instance, some of the constituent words could have a specific meaning that fits only in a certain combination or in a limited set of connected words such as having a high opinion of, a high office, a high wind and high seas. In each collocation, the lexical item high has a rather different collocational sense which differs dramatically from that of high in a high wall ( Cruse, 2006:27).

However, certain adjectives such as golden, red and green collocate with some specific nouns like apple. Besides, the noun time might collocate with save, spend and waste as in save time, spend time and waste time (Martynska, *ibid*). Not all words collocate with all adjectives , we need to search for the suitable adjective that collocates with the intended word as in the case of the word crime which needs an adjective that hold the meaning of violent and harmful act like atrocious and vicious (Devenyi, *ibid*).

In any collocation, the lexical item has the ability of to make a firm , ordinary and syntagmatic relationship with neighboring lexical items. (Martynska, 2004:5). Collocations are arbitrary unpredictable and need to be memorized and used as they are. They also cannot be identified by means of the known syntactic and semantic rules as with other forms (Seretan & Wehrli,2006:40).

### **2.Types of Collocation**

Collocation is divided into four types, depending on the degree of their restriction. The first one is the unrestricted, it collocates freely with more than one lexical item, for instance: take a rest/ a holiday/ time/ a notice. The second type is the semi- restricted, the number of the suitable substitutes replacing the elements of collocation is somehow more limited, e.g. harbor doubt/ uncertainty / suspicion or grudges. The third type is the familiar collocation, in which the elements collocate on a regular basis, for instance: unrequited love and lukewarm reception. The last type is the restricted collocation which is fixed and inflexible as in pretty sure and dead drunk (Carter, 1987 cited in Martynska, 2004:5).

Carter (*ibid*) further makes a distinction between 'core collocation ' and 'non- core collocation' words. Core lexical item is the expression that usually collocates with words. It occupies the central part in language than does the non-core. It can define or replace the non-core items. For example, the lexical item eat is regarded as the core word more than words like gormandize (to make a pig of oneself) or devour stuff ( to rapidly destroy), and because it conveys a

basic meaning of all the mentioned meanings. As far as words nearer to the core end of the continuum, the more frequently they collocate. Core and non-core words do not have equal strength since one word can occur with many words while the other can occur with a limited number of words as in the collocation: blonde hair. The word blonde collocates only with a words describing the color of hair, whereas the word hair collocates with a large number of words such as brown, long and short.

Other distinctions include lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. A lexical collocation is defined as the building structure that consists of a verb, a noun, an adjective or an adverb that results in a predictable syntagmatic relation with other items such as:

1- adverb + adjective:

completely satisfied, it is incorrect to say 'downright satisfied'.

2- adjective + noun:

excruciating pain, it is incorrect to say 'excruciating joy'.

3- noun + verb:

lions roar , it is incorrect to say 'lions shout'.

4- verb + noun:

commit suicide, it is incorrect to say 'undertake suicide'.

Those options, in the lexical collocation construction, do not collocate with the other options.

On the other hand, grammatical collocations involve the constructions in which for instance an adjective and a preposition or a verb followed by a specific preposition forming a phrasal verb which is called a collocation. It could also be a noun followed by a certain verb form, as in:

1- verb + preposition: depend on , not 'of'.

2- adjective + preposition: afraid of, not 'at'.

3- noun + verb: strength to lift it, not lifting it'

<https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/collocations-advanced.htm>

Kurosaki (2012:77) depends on two main criteria in his classification of collocation; collocation types and collocation categories. Collocation types are the semantic types of collocation; lexical collocations, while collocation categories are the grammatical structure of collocations, e.g., "verb + noun". Grammatical collocation could be a phrase including a central word either a noun, an adjective or a verb followed by a preposition or even a whole grammatical structure like the infinitive form or a clause. On their part, (Binza & Bosch, 2012: 184) suggest that lexical collocations usually do not contain a preposition, an infinitive, or a clause.

Grammatical collocation is composed of function words such as prepositions and adverbs and all grammatical collocations are fixed , whereas all lexical collocations are restricted collocations (Lu, 2017: 66).

Cowie (2009: 49) distinguishes six main types of lexical collocation:

1. A verb sometimes referring to creation, activation or eradication, nullification followed by a noun or a pronoun.

Example: fly a kite.

2. An adjective followed by a noun

Example: best regards

3. A noun followed by a verb

Example: blizzards rage

4. A unit associated with a noun, like,

Example: a pride of lions

5. An adverb followed by an adjective

Example: sound asleep

6. A verb followed by an adverb

Example: appreciate sincerely

### 3. Restrictions on Collocation

There are certain restrictions on how words are used along in order to form a collocation, e.g., which prepositions or nouns are to be used with certain verbs as in the collocation 'perform an operation' in "The doctor performed the operation". Here, the verb 'perform' can collocate with the noun 'operation' but not with the noun 'discussion'.

Another example is "do", it collocates with wrong, damage and duty, but not with excuse, trouble and noise as in: Do one's duty and don't do wrong. Richard and Schmidt (2010:95).

Lyons (1995: 62) states that the collocational restrictions of expressions consists of the set of contexts in which they occur. The collocation range of the expression is no always determined by the meaning of its parts, since for example the expressions big and large can occur in different contexts where 'big' cannot substitute 'large' without breaking the rules of collocation of the one or the opposite. For instance, large cannot substitute big in:

1-You are making a big mistake.

2-You are making a large mistake.

The second construction is grammatically well-formed and meaningful, but is unacceptable as a collocation.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Participants

The participants of the recent study were (20) fe/male teachers of English secondary schools in Diyala governorate/Baqubah district/ Iraq, (10) for each group. The data was collected systematically via recording the teachers' lectures and then analyzing the study data to shed light on the problems they were constantly confronted with. Then, the lexical collocation errors were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to trace the fundamental barriers related to such inevitable errors, and thus suggested some ways to brace the teachers' collocational knowledge.

### 4.2 Instrument

According to the well-known subtypes of lexical collocations, researchers underlined the errors occurred in the teachers' lectures to reveal which group commits more errors in words combination recognized in BBI dictionary of word combinations (Benson,1997).

### 4.3 Data Collection and Model of analysis

As noted earlier, researchers tended to analyze the data statistically to demonstrate that lexical collocations as any other combination of words need a specific sort of concern and recognition. The data gathered from the teachers' lectures recordings which have been detected and analyzed to judge whether these errors are cognitive errors(i.e., language transfer with all its types and subtypes) or communicational ones(i.e., paraphrasing and approximation). Also, the researchers identified the problematic collocational sets according to the Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English (Lea, 2002), and the online American National Corpus (<http://americannationalcorpus.org>)

### 4.4 Data Analysis

First, teachers' collocational errors, as aforementioned, were analyzed statistically with well-advised reference to the various types of errors' reasons (cognitive and communication strategies). These sources were tabulated alongside the frequent occurrence of each, and then some explanations and justifications were mentioned with the collocation errors the study sample employed in their lectures.

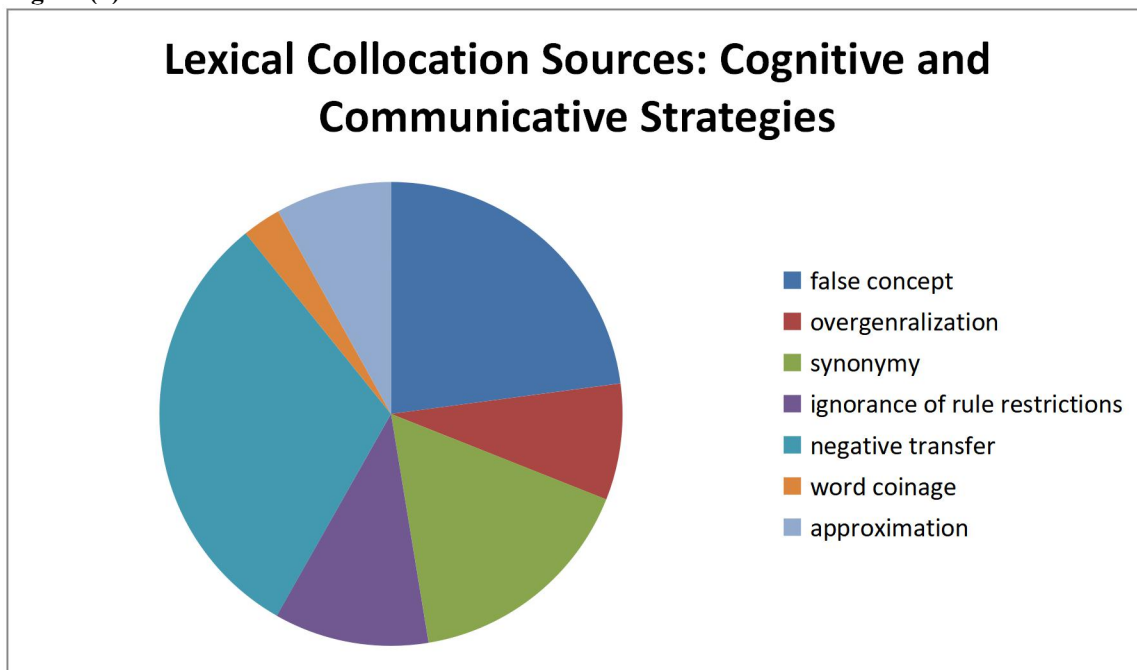
## 5. Results

The results of the study are well tabulated below in table (1) and figure (1) ,revealing the collocation errors sources according to the reasons drawn earlier. In seeking for answering the question of what main reasons are drawn behind such teachers lexical errors, the researchers gave the following values:

Lexical Collocation Sources	Main Types	Subtypes	Freq.	Perc.
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1-Cognitive Strategies	a- Interlingual Transfer	1-False Concept Hypothesized	17	22.9%
		2-Overgeneralization	6	8.1%
		3-The Use of Synonyms	12	16.4%
		4-Ignorance of Rule Restrictions	8	10.8%
2-Communication Strategies	b- Interlingual Transfer	1-Negative transfer	23	31%
		2-Approximation	6	8.1%
Total			74	100%

Figure (1) Sources of Collocation Errors



In the source terms examined in the above table, the researchers found out that most of the lexical collocation errors committed by the Iraqi teachers of English were the result of the interlingual transfer rather than the interlingual transfer. Negative interlingual transfer occupies the highest level with 31% of the total errors and

basically the reason behind this is the negative impact of their Arabic mother tongue. Secondly, false concepts come with about (22.9%), which result from lack of distinction between the suitable words, for example, many teachers ignore the suitable concept to be employed as the use of "do" and "make".

- \* Make your homework (do your homework).
- \* We have a big responsibility( great).

Such confusion in the use of collocation occurs due to the misunderstanding of the lexical words, so the non-native users ignore that. Furthermore, this source is strongly connected with the replacement of synonyms. Many collocation errors occurred as incorrect errors, they are attributed to the misuse of synonyms. Some noticeable collocation errors occurred by teachers of English were :

- \* You have to hit the door(knock).
- \* This man is more beautiful than this one( handsome).

The third source of errors in collocation was the ignorance of the rules of the foreign language. Teachers, here, failed to realize and identify the restrictions and rules of the language they are teaching as in:

\*He is going for fishing (going fishing).

\*The boy is sleep early(sleeps).

Concerning other types of collocations which were tabulated with their statistics and frequencies ,overgeneralization and approximation sources occupy the same rank of occurrence with (8.1%). Such error sources were found rarely in the sample members' lectures as in:

\*The girl saw a cleverer student(clever) APPROXIMATION

\*He wanted to terror him(terrify) APPROXIMATION

\*He is sleep(sleepy) OVERGENERALIZATION

\*The boy is worry about his success(worried) OVERGENERALIZATION

Errors made by Iraqi teachers of English as well as the students are due to the shortage of reading in the specialized area and neglecting the idea of enrolling in training courses as Al- Obaidy (2017:59) recommends that teachers must receive a regular type of training so that they can be confident in their class.

## 6.Conclusions

The researchers concluded the following points:

1-EFL learners in Iraq , at different stages, face difficulties with the use of English collocational forms, specifically those of lexical collocations.

2-There is a serious need for a more concentration on teaching collocations at every stage of learning , especially at the academic stage.

3-Iraqi teachers of English who teach English as a foreign language have some kind of difficulty with lexical collocation. Such difficulty descended from the passive influence of their native language and how it affects their collocational competence.

4-Controlling the use of collocations helps EFL learners to speak more fluently and enable them to predict what will be said based on the use of certain words.

5-The right choice of collocation makes speech more natural and seem like that of the native- speaker.

6-The wrong choice of collocation may hinder the flow of speech and the effective communication.

7-Acquiring the meaning of a word is important but not enough, what is important is knowing its collocational word as well.

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