



# Treatment and Teaching of Collocations

# Introduction

Learning vocabulary is the most important prerequisite for learning any foreign language because one cannot communicate precisely without words. But unfortunately many students are still asked to learn word lists with explanations in English or even equivalents in their native language. This method of learning is faulty not only because each word is usually associated with its mother - tongue equivalent, but also because each word is linguistically and situationally isolated. Words are not learnable as isolates, but in chunks which fall into categories like collocations, idioms (e.g.: kick the bucket), phrasal verbs (e.g.: give in) or proverbs (e.g.: like father like son)... etc.).

Emphasis is laid on the treatment and the relevant techniques for teaching collocation by investigating the notion of collocation and providing a brief conceptual framework that deals with the issue in a practical and interesting way.

# What is collocation?

There are many definitions for collocation. Some of which are:

The company words keep in language.

Words that naturally go together.

The habitual co-occurrence or combination of words .

Collocation refers to two or more words that go together.

Hint

Look at this example to see the difference:

Natural English

fast train/food

a quick shower/meal

Unnatural English

quick train/quick food

a fast shower/meal

# Importance of Collocations

Collocation plays an important role in vocabulary building due to the fact that English is full of collocational pairs and chunks which are fundamental to all language use. Learning collocation is important:

First, your language will be natural and more easily understood (by native speakers).

Second, you will have alternatives and richer ways of expressing yourself.

Third, it is easier for the brain to remember and use language in chunks and blocks rather than as single words. (Hill and Lewis (1999:13).

Finally, knowledge of collocational appropriacy is part of the native speaker's competence, and can be problematic even for the advanced learners who often make inappropriate or unacceptable collocations (McCarthy, 1990:13) .

# Categories of Collocations

For convenience of treatment and brevity of description, a structural (syntactic) configuration has been devised to cover the different and most commonest types of collocations.

Such a description makes it easier for the language user to follow and understand the collocational combinations that occur in language (English in particular).

Accordingly, collocations are categorized into the following groups (Ghazala (1995: 108):

1. Adjective + Noun Collocations
2. Verb + Noun Collocations
3. Noun + Noun Collocations
4. Adverb + Verb collocations
5. Verb + Adverb Collocations

# Treatment and Teaching of Collocations

Make students aware of collocations. This means:

Collocations are to be learnt explicitly through constant and conscious exposure.

Asking students to systematically record the collocations of words newly or previously met will widen their understanding of what words mean and how they are used.

Advocating explicit –deductive treatment when dealing with collocation does not mean that the role of implicit –inductive treatment is to be eliminated.

A mixture of both techniques will give the desired effect.

# Teaching Techniques: Classroom Activities

Unless teachers direct their students' attention, they will not notice and record collocations for themselves (Morgan Lewis, 2001: 23).

The teachers' prominent role is to help learners to identify collocations in text, and highlight the useful relations existing between types of collocations: adjective + noun, verb + adverb ... etc.

The process of training students to recognize collocations in context may take different forms of techniques.

The ultimate aim is to make students more aware of collocations as an effective way to improve their ability to use the language precisely, systematically and naturally.

Technique (1): Matching : Adjective + Noun

Task: Match the following adjectives with nouns in as many combinations as possible:

Adjectives

1.inefficient

2.sufficient

3.enough

4.limited

Nouns

time

responsibility

decision

progress

money

understanding

equipment

administration

Technique (2): Cards of different colours

Task: Choose words on the red cards that collocate with words on the white cards(verb + noun collocations)

White Cards: make, do

Red Cards: mistake, favour, business, research, one's best, believe, progress, homework, discovery ... etc.  
(McCarthy, 1990: 253).

Technique (3): Verb + Adverb" collocations

This technique aims at developing the students' competence at the recognition level to help them differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable collocations.

Task: Identify the acceptable collocations by underlining them

- |              |               |             |               |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1- sleep     | /a . soundly  | b. fully    | c. deeply     |
| 2- thank     | /a. sincerely | b. deeply   | c. warmly     |
| 3- recommend | /a. greatly   | b. highly   | c. deeply     |
| 4- note      | /a. carefully | b. vitally  | c. highly     |
| 5- emphasize | /a. highly    | b. strongly | c. repeatedly |

# Conclusion

Due to the important role which the collocation plays in language learning, its teaching should be a top priority in every language course. The method of treatment and the techniques that follow vary in relation to the level of the learners whether it is elementary, intermediate or ad-vanced.

To conclude, it can be said that all the activities and techniques which have been previously introduced aim at highlighting the learners' awareness of the notion of collocation.

This in turn results in expanding their collocational competence by being consciously and fully involved in this area of language learning. When achieved, this will ultimately lead to a better identification of and mastery over a wide range of collocations which represent a characteristic phenomenon of the English Language.