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Measuring the Collocational Knowledge of EFL Female Saudi University Students' through the
Accuracy in the Translation of Lexical Collocations

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This non-thesis paper entitled:
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Accuracy in the Translation of Lexical Collocations

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The final copy of this paper has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Abstract

This study was designed to measure the Collocational Knowledge of EFL Female Saudi University Students' through the Accuracy in the Translation of Lexical Collocation. This study also analyzes the strategies which were employed by the participants when difficulties arise in attaining the correct answer. Furthermore, the study investigates the relationship between the lexical collocation in context and in isolation. Fifty-five third year (level 6) female students in the Faculty of Art at King Saud University served as study participants. They were given a translation test that consisted of collocations in context (full sentences with the collocations underlined; five examples) and collocations in isolation (seven in English, and six in Arabic). The results revealed a number of errors in translation of collocations. The analysis of some test items showed that participants encountered some problems with certain collocations. Among such problems were collocations which do not have an Arabic equivalent. It also showed that there were no significant differences between collocation in context and collocation in isolation as revealed by the statistical analysis. The analysis showed that English students' collocational knowledge was poor. Inadequate choices of collocations were widespread in their translations, and the translations were often less than apt. Accordingly, any improvement in this area would lead to greater English proficiency.

Abstract (AR)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

ملخص البحث باللغة العربية

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء معرفة الطالبات الجامعيات المتخصصات في اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغةً أجنبيةً بالتلازم اللفظي المعجمي بين المفردات في اللغة الإنجليزية، وذلك من خلال ترجمتهن لهذه المتلازمات، ومن ثم تحليل أخطائهن.

وقد اشتملت العينة على خمس وخمسين طالبةً يدرسن في المستوى السادس . السنة الثالثة . في كلية الآداب بجامعة الملك سعود. واستخدمت الباحثة اختبار ترجمة التلازمات اللفظية بين المفردات؛ لقياس معرفة الطالبات بها. وقد صُمم الاختبار لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، وهو عبارة عن مجموعة من التلازمات اللفظية التي طلب من الطالبات ترجمتها من اللغة العربية وإليها. وتكوّن الاختبار من خمس جمل، تحتوي على تلازم لفظي داخل الجمل، وستة مصطلحات تلازم لفظي منفصلة باللغة الإنجليزية، وكذلك سبعة مصطلحات تلازم لفظي منفصلة باللغة العربية.

وقد أظهرت النتائج أن الطالبات وقعن في العديد من الأخطاء في ترجمة بعض التلازمات اللفظية. ومن خلال تحليل تلك الأخطاء، تبين أنهن واجهن صعوبة في ترجمة بعض الجمل، وعلى وجه الخصوص في ترجمة التلازم بين المفردات الإنجليزية التي ليس له مقابلاً باللغة العربية. كما بينت النتائج أن وجود التلازم اللفظي داخل الجملة لم يشكل فارقاً في ترجمتها، وبالتالي معرفتها كمصطلحات منفردة. علاوة على ذلك خلصت هذه الدراسة الى التعرف على بعض الإستراتيجيات التي وظّفتها الطالبات عند عدم معرفة الترجمة الصحيحة للتلازم اللفظي. وقد دلت النتائج على مستوى غير مُرضٍ من الكفاية في هذا الجانب اللغوي. فضلاً عن أنه لم يكن جيداً بل كان ضعيفاً. وخلصت الباحثة إلى أن الاهتمام و التركيز على تدريس هذا الجانب من اللغة سيسهم في النهوض بمستوى الطالبات اللغوي.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study measures the students' knowledge of lexical collocations through the errors that are made in the field of collocations when native speakers of Arabic translate from Arabic into English and vice versa. This study also analyzes the strategies students employ when they face difficulties in providing correct answer. Furthermore the study investigates the relationship between the lexical collocation in context and in isolation.

J.R. Firth is usually considered to be the "father" of collocation. He was the first to use the term "collocation" in its linguistic sense. According to Firth (1951), a collocation is a "mode of meaning" considering how words regularly co-occur with one another. Furthermore, a collocation refers to two words or more that recurrently co-occur together in the memory of native speakers and are used together with some frequency in both written and spoken discourse Aghbar (1990).

Sinclair (1991) also makes his contribution to our understanding of collocations and their difference from idioms. According to Sinclair, idioms overlap with collocations and the line between them is not clear. He says if the co-occurrence of words gives a single unit of meaning, it is called an idiom, while if the occurrence is the selection of two related words and each word keeps some meaning of its own, it is called a collocation.

Although collocation has become the subject of linguistic study only recently, it has attracted a growing interest from numerous linguists and has been defined in various ways. Accordingly, there is no exhaustive and uniform definition or categorization of collocation. Therefore, most of the researchers who define collocation agree that it is a lexical unit consisting

of a cluster of two or three words from different parts of speech, (see e.g. Baker, 1992; Benson, Benson and Ilson, 1997; Williams, 2002).

Collocation is arbitrary and unpredictable, (Benson, Benson and Ilson, 1986; Lewis, 1997; Woolard, 2000; Lewis, 1997). For example, it is correct to say *to make the bed*, but not *to do the bed*; *to turn on* but not *to open the light*; *sales volume* but not *sales amount*; *bread and butter* but not *butter and bread*, etc. Obviously, this is something EFL learners find hard to cope with, as is the production of collocations effectively if collocations are not focused on and practiced.

Lewis (1993) believes that learning collocations is equal to learning language. Collocations are one of the areas that produce problems for learners of English as a foreign language, it tends to be one of the most problematic and error-generating area of vocabulary, especially for second language learners. McCarthy says that 'even very advanced learners often make inappropriate or unacceptable collocations' (1990:13)

Learning a foreign language used to be predominantly associated with learning its grammatical structures. In short, the significance of vocabulary in the learning process was not given much attention while the function of grammar was regarded as being superior. It was not until Lewis [1994], who developed the *Lexical Approach* theory, that the pivotal role of lexis as the basics of any language became highly respectable.

In this study, students' knowledge of lexical collocation is investigated through the analysis of their errors when translating from Arabic to English and from English to Arabic.

Brown (1993:204) defines errors as "a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of the native speaker, reflecting the inter-language competence of the learner" The researcher can

consider a collocational problem as an obvious deviation from the adult collocation of a native speaker in terms of Brown's view of error analysis.

The merit of error analysis is finding some keys to the understanding of the process of second language acquisition because a learner's errors provide the researchers with evidence of how language is learned and acquired (Brown 1993:205). Consequently, in the area of collocation, finding the source of error through problem analysis can enable us to find out students' inner system of L2 collocational acquisition and create effective strategies for a more native-like system.

Statement of the problem

The researcher aimed to measure Saudi female university students' collocational knowledge through their translation errors in collocation, and the contrastive problems encountered by native speakers of Arabic when encoding.

Significance of the Study

In this study the researchers attempted to measure the collocational knowledge through the accuracy in the translation of lexical collocation. The results will help in raising the awareness of teachers and curriculum writers regarding the acquisition and use of collocations by EFL female university students and consequently help in the development of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia.

Purpose of the Study

One of the most important aspects of learning a language is learning the vocabulary of that language and its appropriate use. Vocabulary in general and collocation in particular are important to language learning. If collocational associations are not properly taught and learned, the resulting irregularities will immediately mark the learners' speech or writing as problematic and non-native. As Lewis Michael (2000) claims, collocations should be taught because they constitute the

central part of vocabulary; accordingly, Michael Lewis (1993) could be considered the father of the lexical approach. He argues that language acquisition takes place when the learner is able to analyze the language into lexical 'chunks'. In other words, learning English collocations would make the speech and the writing of foreign language learners' sound native-like. As claimed by McCarthy and O'Dell (2008), collocations "...give you the most natural way to say something: *smoking is strictly forbidden* is more natural than *smoking is strongly forbidden*". So, collocations are prefabricated chunks that are already stored in the learners' memory. It is these chunks which are retrieved by the learner when (s) he produces the language not isolated words. In this respect, vocabulary learning is a focal point in language acquisition. This study investigates and attempts to discover irregularities in Saudi EFL learner knowledge of collocation through their collocation translation. However, only a few studies have been conducted in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, university courses and school curricula in KSA have not given much attention to collocations. As Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) have argued, many ESL university students' comprehension of academic discourse is negatively affected by poor command of collocations. This study, therefore, attempts to elaborate on the connection between collocational knowledge and language proficiency of Saudi university students.

Research Questions:

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Do EFL Saudi female students make (did not understand your comment here) mistakes in the translation of lexical collocations? If so, how frequently do they make such mistakes?
2. What are the strategies that students employ when they face difficulties in providing the correct answer?
3. Do students find it easier to translate collocations within a context or in isolation?

Limitations of the Study

Although this research was carefully prepared and efforts were made to have accurate data, there were unavoidable limitations and shortcomings. First of all, only one type of lexical collocation was focused on, which was adjective-noun collocation, more types of collocations could be added in further researches. Second, research was conducted by using one instrument which was a translation of collocation test, different instruments such as interviews and writing test may provide more accurate measures of students' lexical collocation knowledge. Third, the test items were limited to 18 items. More lexical collocation items could be added in future study. Finally, regarding participants, the study was conducted on a limited number of college-level students, all of whom were female. As such, findings cannot be generalized beyond the participants of the study.

Definition of terms

Collocation: the habitual occurrence of a word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance or a word or group of words that habitually occur together (e.g. *heavy drinker*)-(Oxford English dictionary).

Definition of collocations

Some linguists distinguish it from multi-word units or lexical chunks (Thornbury 2002) , while others regard it as one of the members of multi-word family or lexical chunks (Lewis 1997). However it is broadly agreed that collocations are those combinations of words which occur naturally with greater than random frequency (Lewis 1997 ; Carter 1998 ; DeCarrico 2001 ; Nation 2001) .

Classification of types of collocations

Collocations fall into two major groups: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations (Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1997, p. xx).

Grammatical collocations: Grammatical collocations consist of a noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive or a clause. Examples of grammatical collocations include; *account for*, *advantage over*, *adjacent to*, *by accident*, *to be afraid that*.

Lexical collocations: Lexical collocations consist of various combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Lexical collocations, in contrast to grammatical collocations, do not contain prepositions, infinitives or clauses. Benson et al. (1997) distinguish between several structural types of lexical collocations: *verb+noun* (inflict a wound, withdraw an offer), *adjective+noun* (a crushing defeat), *noun+verb* (storms rage), *noun+noun* (a world capital), *adverb+adjective* (deeply absorbed), *verb+adverb* (appreciate sincerely).