

# The Role of Teaching Lexical Collocations in Raising EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency

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## Abstract

Collocations and its relations to learning English language have attracted the attention of linguists and scholars so far. This paper investigates the importance of teaching lexical collocations to improve EFL learners' oral fluency. The hypothesis is that knowing collocations specifically lexical collocations and collocational usage in the right order would eventually improve their oral fluency and helps them speak as natural as native speakers of English language. The paper sheds light on the origins of collocations, its types, and patterns. It also clarifies the difference and relations of collocations with other phraseological combinations such as free combinations, idioms, phrasal verbs, proverbs and lexical bundles. Moreover, it focuses on the effect of lexical collocations on speaking skills, fluency, and accuracy. Besides, another part of the thesis contains describing the ways of teaching collocations and raising students' awareness of collocations. Furthermore, it highlights the sources of making mistakes and the importance of how to rectify the mistakes or mis-collocations.

## CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 The origins of Collocations:

Scholars and linguists started to investigate collocations or meaning of words and multi-word units a long time ago when they realized that the meaning of words may sometime depend on other words and lexical units which they occur with. It is believed that the history of studies on collocations would go back to 2,300 years ago in Greece, "the Greek Stoics related collocations to semantics and used the concept of collocation to study the meaning relationships between words" (Namvar et al. 2012, p.13). Robins stated that Greek scholars believed that "words do not exist in isolation, and they may differ according to the collocation in which they are used" (Robins, 1976, p.21). Hence, J. R. Firth who was the pioneer in the field of collocations was affected by the Greek scholars and many of his statements were alike to those of Greek scholars as he wrote "words are mutually expectant and mutually comprehended" (Firth, 1957, p.12). However concerning the word 'collocation' and its origins, it is believed that the word comes from Latin "the origin of the term collocation is the Latin verb 'collocare', which means to set in order/to arrange" (Muller, 2008, p.1). It is clear that collocation or to collocate is putting words or lexical units together and making one meaningful and acceptable lexical unit. Working on collocations long times ago give us an idea about their significant role in learning English language and due to that it had been investigated for such a long period ago.

### 1.2 Definitions of Collocations:

Collocations and their role in teaching and learning English language has been extensively researched for last two or three decades up to nowadays. Many researches have investigated the relations of collocations and learning English as a second or a foreign language. In the most definitions of collocations by different scholars and linguists what is clear and repeated is "co-occurrence" of the words or patterns.

It is believed that the first scholar who focused on collocations was J. R. Firth; in other words he argued that the meaning of a word depends on the words or lexical units which co-occur with it when he says "you shall know a word by the company it keeps" (Firth, 1957, p.195). It is believed that the word 'collocation' was first coined by Firth in defining collocations he stated that "collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word order but not in other contextual order and emphatically not in any grammatical order. The collocation of a word or a 'piece' is not to be regarded as mere juxtaposition, it is an order of mutual expectancy" (ibid, p.181). One good example for the definition is the word *heavy* which collocates with *rain* (*heavy rain*) it is assumed one of the meanings of *rain* is its collocability with *heavy*. F.R. Palmer, who had been affected greatly by Firth, argued that for Firth collocation "was merely part of meaning of a word" (Palmer, 1981, p.94). It is clear that the meaning of a word also depends on the context of situations and consequently we can find different meanings of a word by putting it in different linguistic contexts, as an example, by putting the word *Chair* in different contexts the meaning varies according to the context.

In relation to fixedness, it is clear that collocations are fixed and prefabricated lexical units (Benson et al. 1986a) stressed on fixedness and non-idiomaticity of collocations. Since collocation is concerned with how words go together, the co-occurrence of which words with which other words determines the meaning "knowing which words go together is an important part of understanding the meaning of a text and translating it well" (Larson, 1998, P.155). So, the co-text of the word affects its meaning in the words around would influence its

translations. Furthermore, in arranging our mental lexicon a great part of the words are put in order as collocations “one way we seem to organize our knowledge of words is simply on the basis of collocation or frequently occurring together” (Yule, 2010, P.122), and again this highlights range of fixedness of collocations. Due to the fact that collocations are ‘prefabricated’ units and by going back to Firth’s ‘mutual expectancy of words’ the notion of collocation is when we see one word in a context, then we could expect the other constituent of it around.

Students of EFL/ESL should make an effort to learn collocations due to their important role in learning and improving English vocabulary. Guessing of collocations is probably natural and easy for native speaker, but learners may face difficulty and sometimes they might make mistakes in using appropriate collocates. In this sense it is important for English learners to identify and learn collocations. For Michael Lewis, collocation is “the readily observable phenomenon whereby certain words co-occur in natural text with greater than random frequency” (Lewis, 1997, p.8). By using certain words, he argued that all words which are put together in a text must not be seen as collocations, while we have various types of word combinations in English. This is to differentiate collocations from the other phraseological units which make up from the co-occurrence of two or more elements together.

We mentioned several definitions of collocations above, but still there are many other definitions by different linguists or researchers. What, almost all of them, mention or agree on is that the co-occurrence of two or more words constitute collocations and they are, in one way or other, distinguished from other vocabulary units such as idioms, compound nouns, phrasal verbs... etc.

### 1.3 Types of collocations:

Collocations have been categorized in different types from the perspective of different linguists. Some classified collocations according to their strength while some others classified them according to the arrangement of parts of speech which constitute the collocation, but there are other scholars who categorized them according to the context they are used in. Here we mention the types of collocations as they appear in the following types:

#### 1.3.1 Grammatical vs. lexical collocations:

The first classification of collocation is the one between grammatical and lexical collocation, the focus of this study will be on the latter. The most distinguishing point between grammatical and lexical collocations is that of their make up while “a grammatical collocation is a phrase consisting of a dominant word (noun, adjective, verb) and a preposition or grammatical structure such as an infinitive or clause” (Benson et al. 1986a, p.xix). They described eight major types of grammatical collocations which are included in their dictionary and they have designated by G1, G2, G3, etc as in the following table:

**Table 1 Grammatical collocations by Benson, et al. (1986a)**

	Grammatical Collocations	Examples
<b>G1</b>	Noun + preposition combination	Blockade against, apathy towards
<b>G2</b>	Noun + to infinitive	It was pleasure to do it
<b>G3</b>	Noun + that clause	He took an oath that he would do his duty
<b>G4</b>	Preposition + noun	In agony, at anchor, by accident
<b>G5</b>	Adjective + preposition	Angry at, fond of, deaf to
<b>G6</b>	Predict adjective + to infinitive	It was necessary to work, it was stupid to go
<b>G7</b>	Adjective + that clause	It is necessary that he be replaced immediately, she was afraid that she would fail
<b>G8</b>	Consists of 19 English verbs	Send (dative movement transformation) He sent the book to his brother

But concerning lexical collocations’ make up and their difference with grammatical collocations is that lexical collocations, in contrast to grammatical collocations, normally do not consist of prepositions, infinitives, or clauses, they consist of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. So, it is clear that the lexical collocations consist only of content words, while function words are not included in the phrases. Benson et al. (1986a) described seven major types of lexical collocations in their BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations, which are designated by L1, L2, L3, etc as it is illustrated in the following table (2):

**Table 2 Lexical collocations by Benson, et al. (1986a)**

	Lexical collocations	Examples
<b>L1</b>	Verb + noun	Compose music, fly a kite, launch a missile
<b>L2</b>	Verb (eradication or nullification) + noun	Break a code, revoke a license, crush resistance
<b>L3</b>	Adjective + noun	Reckless abandon, strong tea, crushing defeat
<b>L4</b>	Noun + verb	blizzards rage, blood circulates, bees buzz
<b>L5</b>	Noun + noun	A herd of buffalo, a school of whales, an act of violence
<b>L6</b>	Adverb + adjective	Hopelessly addicted, sound asleep, keenly aware
<b>L7</b>	Verb + adverb	Apologize humbly, argue heatedly, appreciate sincerely

### 1.3.2 Upward vs. downward collocations:

Sinclair (1991) mentioned two types of collocations ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ collocations. Sinclair utilized two terms to classify collocations “the term node for the word that is being studied, and the term collocate for any word that occurs in the specified environment of a node” (Sinclair 1991, p.115). And the distinguishing point between the two types is related to the frequency of components of the phrase, thus when (a) is node and (b) is collocate, Sinclair calls it ‘downward’ collocation, ‘collocation of (a) with less frequent word (b)’, e.g. arrive and bring are less frequently occurring collocates of back. But when (b) is node and (a) is collocate, according to Sinclair, it is an ‘upward’ collocation. The word back, for instance, collocates with down/from/into which are more frequent than the word back. The difference between upward and downward collocations, which is ‘systematic’ according to Sinclair, is that “upward collocation, of course, is the weaker pattern in statistical terms, and the words tend to be elements of grammatical frame, or super-ordinates. Downward collocation by contrast gives us a semantic analysis of a word” (ibid, p.116).

### 1.3.3 Strong vs. common collocations:

Categorizing collocations according to strength depends on the combination of words. So the collocation will be counted as a weak collocation when the words that constituted it are used with several more words and making different other collocations, for instance, adjectives such as *good* and *bad* can precede several nouns and be repeated in different collocations. But the collocation is strong when its components are not used in numerous collocations and when we see one part the other component will be predicted, as an example *rancid butter*.

Jimmie Hill (in Lewis 2000, p.63-64) categorized collocation according to their strength as follow:

- a. **Unique collocations:** some collocations are unique and should be distinguished from others as they are fixed. Considering the word foot in foot the bill which is used as a verb in this collocation, but footing the invoice or footing the coffee will not be possible. Likewise, shrug shoulders is accepted but shrugging other parts of our anatomy is not possible. Thus these two collocations are unique.
- b. **Strong collocations:** they are a large number of collocations which are strong or very strong but not unique. Examples like: trenchant criticism, ulterior motives, harbor grudges, moved to tears.
- c. **Weak collocations:** there are many weak collocations as many things can be useful or useless, acceptable or unacceptable. It will be easy for learners to make new and different combinations such as: blue shirt, red car, white wine, black hair...etc. EFL/ESL learners may be able to use the color in English in the same way in their first language.
- d. **Medium-strength collocation:** those collocations are many thousands according to Hill, as they constitute a huge fraction of our production either speaking or writing. The collocations like hold a conversation, make a mistake, which represent a single item of meaning, would lay under these group of collocations. According to Hill, these medium-strength collocations are important and must be paid attention to “it is this area of medium-strength collocations which is of prime importance in expanding learners’ mental lexicon.”(ibid, p.64).

### 1.3.4 Open vs. restricted collocations:

Cowie and Howarth (in Biskri 2012) categorized two forms of collocations which are ‘open’ collocations and ‘restricted’ collocations. Depending on this sorting, constituents of the open collocation can be freely combined with other words “the elements of the collocation are used literally, for the example, *fill the sink*” (Biskri, 2012, p.25). From this aspect open collocations are, sometimes, called free collocations in which two or more words come together and represent one single meaning unit but there is not any particular relations between them. For the other type which is ‘restricted’ collocation known as ‘fixed collocation’ in which one component of it, is not used in its original literal meaning the similarity between both open and restricted collocations is that their elements may be combined with others. Since restricted collocations are fixed, their constituents can not combine freely with other different words, they seem to resemble idioms “its figuratively used elements cannot be combined with other elements such as *jog one’s memory*. Each restricted collocation carries potential of an idiom” (ibid, p.25). Also Aisenstadt (in: Brashi, 2005, p.23) making a distinction between some phraseological forms such as free word combinations, restricted collocations and idioms, believed that “restricted collocations

are combinations of two or more words used in one of their regular, non-idiomatic meanings... and restricted in their commutability”. Brashi gives the example of word ‘*face*’ which possibly collocate with four different nouns: ‘*the fact, the truth, the problem, and the circumstances*’. So, constituents of restricted collocations are limited in combining with other elements to make a lexical combination.

#### **1.3.5 Technical VS Academic collocations:**

Technical collocations are distinguished from lexical or grammatical collocations in that the former are used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) while the latter which are academic could be found in general English and ESP. The importance of collocations in the textual collections has been highlighted as collocations play a crucial role in the description of this specific language usage. The level of technicality in word behavior, according to Fuentes, may differ in accordance to the subject domains “the salient condition is that elements function uniquely in their corresponding field, describing the restricted setting” (Fuentes, 2001, p.118). He exemplifies with a range of specific combinations identified with the noun *network* in ‘*U-network*’, ‘*access network*’, ‘*local area network*’. Despite technical collocations, there are free collocations which differ considerably in terms of subject matter “are considered semi-technical elements” some handy examples are ‘*information system, information technology, digital information and information about*’ (ibid, p.111). It is due to this technicality issue that we find different kinds of English dictionaries as: business, medical, legal ...etc, which help learners acquire a specific language use. This clarifies each of these aforementioned fields have their own vocabulary. Consequently Fuentes stated that “technical vocabulary is formed by collocations that introduce specialized knowledge in ESP” (ibid, p.118).

#### **1.4 Collocation or Colligation:**

The two terms of collocation and colligation are so close to each other in their spelling and utterance. This similarity may sometimes lead to confusion. While collocation, mentioned previously in the definitions, is the co-occurrence of two or more lexical items together to represent a single semantic unit on the other hand colligation is the co-occurrence of a cluster of words which are syntactically connected. Hoey (in Lewis, 2000, p.234) defined colligation as “the grammatical company a word keeps and the positions it prefers; in other words, a word’s colligations describe what it typically does grammatically”. Hoey’s definition of colligation is close to Firth’s definition of collocation knowing a word by ‘the company it keeps’. As a clarifying example, some employment words like ‘accountant, actor, actress, architect and carpenter’ are nouns but they ‘differ grammatically amongst themselves’ or in other words they have ‘different colligations’. Hoey illustrated that the word ‘accountant is much more likely to occur with a classifier (a wages accountant) and actress is more likely to occur in apposition (actress Debra Winger) than any of the other items’ and it is relatively possible to ‘possess an accountant (my accountant) but virtually impossible to possess an actress’ (ibid). Michael Lewis believed that the ‘entire grammar/vocabulary dichotomy’ is invalid and all language ‘lies on a spectrum between what is fixed and what is variable’ as there are different degrees of ‘fixedness’ and there are different degrees of ‘generalization’ that is why he states “colligation generalizes beyond the level of individual collocations, so *a bunch of grapes/bananas/flowers* are three separate collocations, but the last one can be generalized to *a bunch of (flowers)*, and so generate *a bunch of roses/daffodils/(any other kind of flower)*” (Lewis 2000, p.137).

#### **1.5 Collocations and other phraseological combinations:**

All word combinations made up of two or more words can not be counted as collocations just because they co-occur. Several linguists (Aisentadt 1979; Benson et al. 1986; Carter 1987; Cowie and Howarth 1996) were interested in investigating the differences and role of such word combinations. We have to make a distinction between different phraseological combinations; collocations, free combinations, idioms, proverbs and phrasal verbs. The formation and meaning of each of these combinations must be differentiated in order to avoid confusion among learners and users of such combinations.

##### **1.5.1 Collocations and free combinations:**

Syntagmatically speaking, when two words co-occur in a sentence they could be counted as free combination when their arrangement is not violating the syntactic and grammatical rules, and the elements of these combinations can easily be replaced. In their ‘*BBJ Combinatory Dictionary of English*’ Benson et al, (1986a) stated that free combinations “consist of elements that are joined in accordance with general rules of English syntax and freely allow substitution” (p. xix). Normally a verb can be followed by adverbials (time, place, and manner), thus we will have several possible combinations: *they decided— after dinner, at half past four, in the break, immediately, in the meeting room, on their way, quickly, unenthusiastically, unhesitatingly, with a heavy heart*, etc. What is clear in these instances is that the elements are not fixed in arranging together and they are substitutable. With this substitutability of the elements we can make many more correct and acceptable combinations. Moreover, the meaning of free combinations depends on the literal meaning of their composing elements, thus by removing one element from the whole combination, the meaning can not be inferred from the remaining element.



it might be a clear distinction between native and non-native speakers “learners often rely on single-word equivalents (confuse) even though a native speaker might use phrasal verb in its place (mix up)” (Dagut & Laufer, 1985, p.76). So, it is normal to see that non-natives avoid using too much phrasal verbs, while preferring counterpart single units which seem easier for them. (Siyanova and Schmitt, 2007, p.74) discussed the usage of multi-word verbs versus single-word verbs and stated that English learners often have problems with multi-word verbs but natives prefer using them.

### 1.6 Lexical Bundles:

Lexical bundles occupy a remarkable space amongst what Schmitt (2004) calls them ‘Formulaic Sequences’. According to Biber and Barbieri (2007) the term ‘lexical bundles’ first used in the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan, 1999). In the book lexical bundles are defined as “recurrent expressions, regardless of their idiomaticity, and regardless of their structural status. That is, lexical bundles are simply sequences of word forms that commonly go together in natural discourse” (p.990). In addition, lexical bundles co-occur in longer sequences than other ‘formulaic sequences’ that is they consist of more elements than the other sequences:

*Do you want me to*                      *going to be a*  
*I said to him*                              *I don't know what*

Concerning their relations to collocations, lexical bundles can be regarded as extended collocation; they are a bunch of words that show a statistical tendency to co-occur. They are stored in the mental lexicon and at the same time retrieved as chunks, and the process is the same for collocations. The obvious difference is that collocations mostly consist of two or three words maximum, but lexical bundles consist of three or more than three words e.g. *they're not going to believe this*.

The importance of differentiating between idioms and lexical bundles was emphasized. As idioms are fixed and their meaning is not comprehensible from their elements, lexical bundles on the contrary, are not fixed expressions, and it is not feasible to replace a sequence by a single item. On the other hand lexical bundles are much more widespread than idioms. Biber et al, (1999) exemplified that sequences like: (*in the case of the, there was no significant, it should be noted that*) occur at least 20 times per million words, while idioms like ‘*kick the bucket*’ or ‘*slap in the face*’ occur less than five per million words.

Furthermore, lexical bundles are usually not complete sentences and their meaning is not idiomatic and inferred from the meaning of their elements but they “serve important discourse functions in both spoken and written texts” (Biber and Barbieri, 2007, p.264) e.g. *I don't know if, I just wanted to*. Yet to be mentioned the patterns of lexical bundles changes according to the genre usage “most bundles in conversation are clausal, whereas in academic prose they are mainly phrasal” (Hernandez, 2013, p.188).

Still due to their widespread occurrence and their role, it is emphasized that English learners should have knowledge about them. Also, the usage of these sequences have a clear impact in attaining native-like language “for language learners, the knowledge and use of a wide range of formulaic language helps them to achieve naturalness in language use” (Allen, 2010, p.106), and their important role had been highlighted in showing the difference between fluent and non-fluent language users “their very ‘naturalness’ signaling competent participation in a given community. Conversely, the absence of such clusters might reveal the lack of fluency of a novice or newcomer to that community” (Hyland, 2008, p.8).

## Chapter II:

### Lexical collocations and speaking

#### 2.1 Lexical Collocations

In order to have a thorough understanding of a word, it is necessary to understand how that word relates to other elements of vocabulary and how it combines with other words. Having real mastery of language requires one to know which words collocate with which words. Lexical collocations are those that do not contain infinitives, prepositions or clauses. They are made up of adjectives, verbs, nouns and adverbs. Although the term ‘collocation’ is used in various ways by different authors, the two main concepts are the phraseological approach and the frequency-based approach. The frequency-based approach shows that collocation is the co-occurrence of word at a higher frequency than expected if words were arbitrarily combined in a language. Some of the representatives of this approach are Halliday, Sinclair, and Firth. On the other hand, the phraseological approach shows that collocations are relations of two or more lexemes that are identified by their occurrence in a particular range of grammatical constructions. Chodkiewicz (2000) classified lexical organization as the following figure and categorized collocations under the syntagmatic relations: (adopted from Arabski, J and Wojtaszek, A, 2010, p. 127)

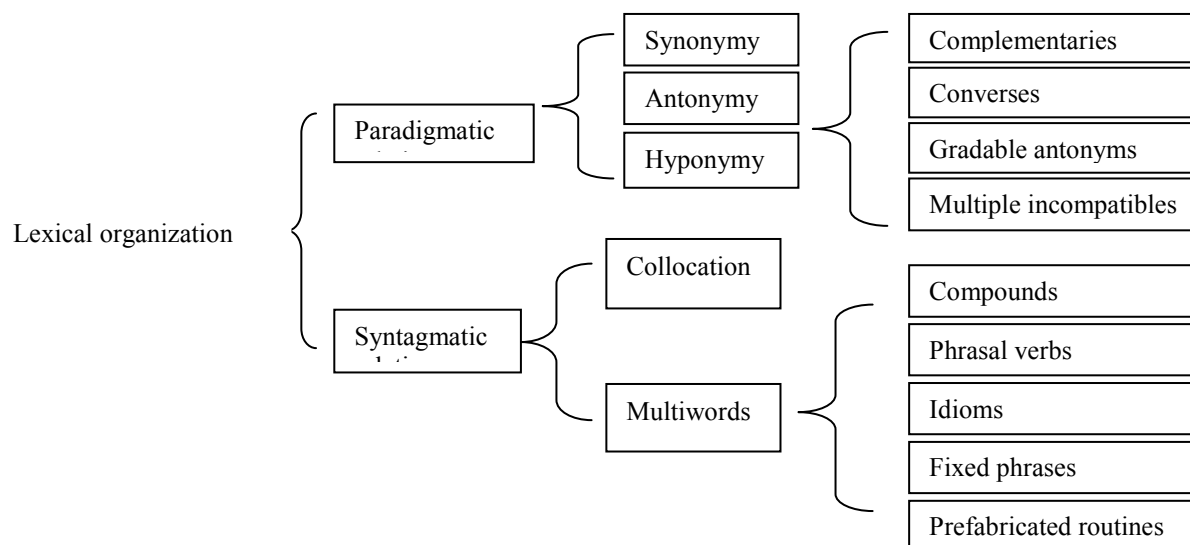


Figure 1 Types of Lexical Organization

According to Carter, lexemes are the basic or primary contrasting units of vocabulary found in a language. For instance, when searching for words such as brought or bringing, we can find them by looking up the lexeme ‘bring’ (Carter, 1987, p.47). Other authors such as Lewis argued that the lexical approach is based on the opinion that language is made up of significant chunks that are combined to produce coherent text. These bits are what Lewis believes form the data which learners use to perceive and form patterns and other linguistic features (Lewis, 2008, p.39). However, despite the numerous studies that have been done in grammar, collocation, and lexis, there is still a lot to be done in trying to understand the relationship between teaching collocation and how it affects EFL learners’ speaking proficiency.

## 2.2 Effect of Lexical Collocations on Speaking Proficiency

The most efficient way of analyzing the effect of lexical collocations on EFL learners is through error analysis considering the approach is widely used in various teaching methods. Many EFL learners have enough access to lexical knowledge. However, it is difficult for them to use collocations correctly. English speakers say ‘make a mistake’ which is a correct collocation. However, Iranians who are an example of EFL learners think in their native language and say ‘do a mistake’ which is incorrect in the English language. Several factors hinder EFL students from making correct collocations. They include:

**Transfers:** Transfer refers to the influence that occurs as a result of the similarities and differences between an individual’s first language and the acquired or learned language. In this case the learners use knowledge of their mother tongue (L1) and apply the same to the second language (L2). There can be either positive or negative transfer. Positive transfer occurs when an L1 structure is used in an L2 utterance resulting in an almost correct collocation in L2. On the other hand, a negative transfer occurs when an L1 structure is used in an L2 utterance resulting in an incorrect collocation.

**Inter-lingual transfer:** This is in refers the negative influence that EFL learners experience due to their mother tongue. The patterns of the learners’ native language prevent them from acquiring the patterns of the second language (Krashen, 1981. P.117). For instance, Iranians in their L1 structure ‘be’ must apply with ‘agree’ so they say ‘I am agree’ which is unacceptable in the English language. The inter-lingual transfer makes EFL learners to think in their mother tongue then transfer the same to the second language resulting in non-target-like sentence structures.

**Intra-lingual transfers:** This is the complete vice versa of inter-lingual transfer since it involves the negative transfer of items within the target language. It is the incorrect summarization of rules within the target language. This type of transfer also relates to errors because of the language being learned which is independent of the native language.

**Overgeneralization:** Overgeneralization is a type of intra-lingual transfer which occurs when EFL learners create a deviant construction based on other structures in the target language. The learners take a rule that they have learned before and generalize it then use it in a different structure making it wrong. For example, in a sentence like “she sings,” EFL learners know of the rule that “s” is added to a verb to form the third person singular. However, they take this rule and summarize it for other structures saying something like “she can drives” which is grammatically wrong in English.

The acquisition of transferability of collocation patterns from the first language to the second one shows a cross-linguistic effect in inter-language. Its importance as a component of second language acquisition has over

years been analyzed in various ways. Inter-language speakers use transfer in communication using the second language both in reception and production. Transfer in production refers to the process of activating the mother tongue to achieve a communicative objective. In this process, learners rely on the patterns used in the first language to interpret any incoming utterances.

Kellerman shows that there is plenty of evidence supporting the theory that L1 has a lot of influence on the L2 for learning lexis in the second language (Kellerman, 1983, p.115). Acquisition of lexis is normally facilitated if both L1 and L2 languages are related. In some cases, the transfer still results in correct collocations. However, EFL learners presume that a one-to-one correspondence between the first and second language does not exist. Due to these problems that arise due to collections, it is necessary for appropriate teaching techniques to be applied in teaching collocations so that learners can speak proficiently.

### 2.3 Teaching methods for collocations:

Considering there are different forms of collocations, teaching methods also vary. Some methods and learning activities are more suitable for teaching specific types of collocations than others.

**Deliberate learning of new collocations:** Channel was one of the few authors to advocate for the teaching of collocations (Channel, 1981, P 120.). She saw that EFL learners could not realize the full potential of known words since they only used them in a few collocations that they felt certain of. She saw the need to expose these learners to a wide variety of collocations when they use a word acquired for the first time for it to prevail over the limited use of collocations. For perfect collocation, collocation grids could be used such as the one below (Channel, 1981, P.120).

	Handsome	Pretty	Charming	Lovely
Woman		+	+	+
Child		+	+	+
Dog		+		+
Bird		+		+
Flower		+		+
Weather				+
Landscape		+		+
View		+		+
Furniture	+	+		+
Bed		+		+
Dress		+	+	+
Voice			+	

The grid is used to make a representation of many verb + noun and adjective + noun combinations. However, some critics question the effectiveness of grids since they only provide information on the forms of collocations and do not include their usage. They feel that complete knowledge of all usage aspects such as semantics, prosody and pragmatics can be learned best through typical contexts. It is, therefore, important for teachers to understand how they can use grids to help learners and know their limitations so that they can use them efficiently in conjunction with other methods or teaching activities.

**Dictionaries:** Another tool that can be employed as a source of data is the collocation dictionary. Although this tool is more efficient for the more advanced learners. It can be used as an independent learning strategy for students to improve their collocation knowledge. For example, if a learner has difficulty understanding the phrase “she has made a fool of you,” he/she can use the dictionary to look up the word ‘fool’ where he will find various phrases relating to that word and their meanings. Through this knowledge, EFL learners can better understand different expressions hence providing them with the limitations for usage. Since this method is done by the student independently, the role of the teacher is to guide the learners on how to record the information they get.

**Corpus and Concordances:** Fox insists on the need to use spoken language when deciding which collocations to teach. He says that the over ten million words present in the British National Corpus (BNC) spoken section contain one of the most frequent patterns of spoken collocations. However, due to the changes that occur in language over time, there may arise the need to keep the list updated continually. In addition, Fox believes that teachers should teach collocations based on frequency to help them concentrate on the common and most important words (Fox, 1998, p.119). Koosha and Jafarpour explain concordance as the method of analyzing language through the study of lexical patterns and constructions found in the database (Koosha, 2006, P. 204). This strategy is one that could help EFL learners recognize collocations in various contexts together with how they are used by native speakers of the target language.

**Collocations in texts:** In this category, documents found in magazines or newspapers can be a reliable source of collocations for teachers to use. They can use sentences from articles and analyze the structure while highlighting any collocations they come across with the learners. They can also highlight adjectives in the



sentences then the EFL students can find and create other possible collocations. This method will help students understand and grasp many collocations since they will be researching them on their own and even be discussing them among themselves before passing their results back to the teachers.

#### **2.4 Characteristics of speaking performance**

Many researchers in language describe speaking ability as the level in which one knows a language. Fluency is defined as the ability to effectively communicate with others other than just the capacity to read and write. Fluency, as well as accuracy, is a concept which is used in teaching speaking skills. Therefore, learners need to master fluency and precision.

**Fluency:** Among all four skills of language (speaking, writing, listening and reading) either receptive or productive, speaking is the most important one. Since knowing a language is remarked greatly by what is called oral proficiency, and those who can manage a language very well are called fluent people. Therefore, speaking fluency is the basic marker of knowing, and using a language.

Hughes defines fluency as “the ability to express oneself in a reasonable, intelligible and accurate manner without hesitation. Otherwise, communication will break because the listeners will lose interest” (Hughes, 2002, P.14). This definition shows just how much fluency and accuracy relate closely. Many EFL learners make the mistake of associating fluency with the ability to speak fast hence they talk without pauses. However, the aspect of fluency is reflected by two main components: regularity and speed of delivery which means a natural amount of well-distributed pauses is necessary (Bygate, 2009, P.412)

**Accuracy:** Accuracy is defined as the ability to produce sentences that are grammatically correct. Use of controlled accuracy-focused activities for English learners can help them use the language even though they may not be ready yet to use it by themselves. Through this, they can gradually transfer that passive knowledge into their actual daily use. It is important for learners to be notified when they are performing activities that are accuracy based so that the activity does not miss its aim. Students may mistakenly take the accuracy activities to be fluency practice which will not help in developing their language skills. In teaching of speaking skills, it is important that learners focus on things such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation

- Grammar

Grammar refers to the system of language that the principles of that same language are organized. Some of the principles in the English language use that for a sentence to be grammatically correct, it needs to have a subject and a verb followed by an object, adverbial or complement. However, the grammar of speech is organized differently from that of writing. For example, the following features are for spoken grammar:

1. Interjections (oh, wow)
2. Frequent non-clausal units (huh, yeah, Mmmm)
3. Hesitators (mm, umm)
4. Direct speech favored
5. Condensed questions (Any luck?)

Accuracy in grammar helps in adding meanings that cannot be easily inferred from the context. Through grammar, learners can be able to describe the world regarding how, when and where things happen. It also helps with interaction with people and ensures that speakers’ deliver their intended meaning.

- Vocabulary

Accurate vocabulary is triggered by selecting perfect words that have correct definitions. Sometimes learners try to express what they want to say and end up using inappropriate vocabulary. Sometimes they also use words incorrectly such as synonyms which carry different meanings in various contexts. The knowledge of classes of words also helps speakers form utterances accurately. Therefore, teachers should assist learners by giving them practical information and vocabulary. Learners will be able to produce grammatically correct and well-connected sentences that are appropriate for the given contexts.

- Pronunciation

Pronunciation teaching can improve students’ speaking immeasurably. Students can acquire proper pronunciation depending on their attitude towards how they speak and how they hear. At the production stage, students are advised to focus on word and phrase/sentence stress and intonation to identify the various patterns for rising and falling tones. Good speaking requires a lot of effort and active speaking practice. Learners should prepare their talks, rehearse, practice on how to control body language, nerves, voice and even speed during their speech.

#### **2.5 Impact of English language on acquisition of lexical collocations**

Fluent use of a native language is taken to involve the frequent use of collocations which means the native speakers have access to tons of words. Since they have knowledge of grammar features and vocabulary, they can use it to produce and gain an understanding of very many words even those they have never heard of before.

However, one mistake native speakers do is putting many combined words together in various ways just to satisfy their communicative needs. When words are used together in a chunk, they gain the ability to predict each other's occurrence (Namvar, 2012, P.12).

Firth described language in both situational and linguistic context saying "you will know a word by the company it keeps" (Firth, 1957 p.195). This statement showed that whenever we find one collocating word, we should expect to find the other. Having knowledge of vocabulary is not just about the meanings of various words that are isolated but is also about knowing other words that tend to occur with it. The English language is full of collocations and combinations of words that occur together. For instance, we say we are going somewhere 'by train' or 'on foot' and that is how it is. Those words cannot be changed because they appear together.

Automation of collocations has proved to help native speakers express themselves more fluently since the collocating words are already there for use. However, it is not the same for EFL learners because they lack this automation hence end up making the wrong combination of words when speaking. In order for EFL students to reach the native-like fluency, they need to understand that their ability to understand lexical collocations is an important part in enhancing their speaking proficiency.

It is quite clear that EFL learners have severe difficulty with collocations. Lack of knowledge makes speaking fluently very challenging because the knowledge of collocations is crucial in the production of language. This experience enables learners to come across as natives, make natural choices and also process language accurately and fluently in real-time situations. Basic grammar knowledge and a broad range of vocabulary are not sufficient for learners to fluently communicate. They must learn the collocations by exposing themselves to the English language and using it as often as possible. After using the language for a while, they will be able to identify which words collocate with which and use them accurately in their communication.

## 2.6 Miscollocations and its causes

Most cases of miscollocations are as a result of lack of comprehension of the collocation concepts and also interlingual transfer. The following is a summary of the primary causes of miscollocation.

- Lack of collocation concepts: Most learners only understand the underlying meanings of words but cannot determine which words they would match. This means that these learners lack basic collocation concepts hence cannot produce proper collocations.
- Lack of knowledge of collocation properties: Many students do not know the collocation features which explains why they would mismatch words in their utterances. For example, many are familiar with collocations such as 'good boy.' However, when faced with other words, they mismatch collocations and end up saying things like 'good knowledge' which is obviously wrong. If they understand the collocation properties, the students can use the features to figure out which words go with which ones.
- Ignorance of rule restrictions: Other students fail to take grammar into consideration during collocation. They do not understand that some collocation restrictions are based entirely on the meanings and range of the words. As a result, they end up producing grammatically wrong collocations.
- Direct translation: Translation is a big problem for learners because they try to derive collocations by translating those in their language to English. They do not realize that different languages have different rules and concepts and what may be correct in their mother tongue may be totally wrong in English.

## 2.7 Raising awareness on collocations

Collocations are unpredictable and arbitrary which makes it difficult for the non-native speaker to catch up with them quickly. It is necessary that teachers make an effort to increase awareness of the collocations among EFL learners because they are not only useful for comprehending the English language but also for producing it. Memorization of collocation groups can help learners increase their basic knowledge. Students will not need to start reconstructing the language whenever they have something to say. Instead, they will use the collocations which are like pre-packaged chunks of words.

The frequent teaching of collocations to students helps them make more use of collocations accurately. Recently, collocations are emerging as a critical component of lexical patterning hence making it a widely established unit in the teaching materials and courses. The following are arguments that show the importance of creating awareness on collocations among learners.

- Knowledge of language requires knowledge of collocations: Collocations are found everywhere hence shows the strong patterning that is found in language and using a word-by-word approach cannot sufficiently account for meanings in texts or speech. Knowledge of language depends on the comprehension of collocations because they are the basis of learning and using the English language (Nation, 2001, P. 321).
- Fluent use of language requires collocational knowledge: Another reason for creating awareness on collocations is that it leads to the fluent and accurate use of language. Especially for the case of oral communication, memorization of sequences of words, sentences or phrases form a large part of the stretches heard in speeches on a daily basis.

• Language acquisition requires collocation knowledge: Language is acquired easily and much faster when learned in sets of phrases which makes collocations an effective way to use to enhance language acquisition. Learners have an easier time mastering a new language when they learn it using phrases or prefabricated routines since these phrases have been proved to be more efficient than creatively generated language. Creating awareness on collocations can help learners achieve that native-like fluency in their speech such that they can be able to communicate clearly and confidently.

### **Concluding remarks**

This paper aimed to investigate collocations, its types and importance, and most importantly collocations' effect on speaking proficiency among students of EFL. Collocations constitute a great part of English language vocabulary and due to the important role they play in learning English, collocations have attracted attention of many linguists through past few decades. For native speakers collocations are easy to learn and use, but EFL/ESL learners have to make effort to learn and retrieve collocations which make their English output natural and native-like since collocations can not be guessed randomly. Having good knowledge of collocations help enhance learners' vocabulary, thus it helps them to produce clear and accurate utterances and sentences. On the other hand, shortage of such knowledge may lead to mistakes and using words inappropriately which rise from arranging words in a wrong order. Lexical collocations are essential components of English vocabulary and are easily distinguished from other multiword components such as free combinations, idioms, phrasal verbs and bundles.

For learning and using collocations accurately a range of methods can be applied. Moreover, recognizing miscollocations and their causes also help in the enhancement of learners' speaking skills. Also, with more practice learners can improve their skills and overcome miscollocations and mistakes they make during their speaking. Traditionally most focus was on reading and writing, but now it is on speaking as the essence of oral communication.

1. By learning chunks especially collocations learners eventually solve the problem of arranging words in wrong order. Generally, when learners focus only on single words they may learn a good number of new items, but they face the problem of putting the right words together in their speaking.
2. Lexical collocations as a major type of collocations formulate a great part of English vocabulary. Knowledge and usage of lexical collocations properly would definitely help learners to learn the language in an easier and better way.
3. Teaching collocations in general and specifically lexical collocations is preferred to be through modules of vocabulary not as a separate module. And in case of mistakes and miscollocating, teachers could respond by making the learners pay more attention or give them the right collocations.
4. The most preferred way of raising learners' awareness of lexical collocations is giving them texts with collocations underlined. This method also assists learners to see and learn how collocations are used properly in texts which they can use the collocation appropriately in their speaking.
5. Having lexical collocations' competence would pave the way for learners to gain confidence and speak fluently. With proper word arranging their oral output could be more comprehensible and native-like.
6. Owning and using a dictionary of English collocations would be helpful for learners to find and use right collocations and avoid inapt usage of collocations. Besides, having such a dictionary helps learners avoid usage of English collocations as they do in their mother tongue which sometimes lead to mistakes or miscollocations.
7. Learners' mother tongue or L1 has a great impact on their L2 learning as it is the case of our students. They sometimes use literal translations instead of using appropriate collocations. Therefore, focusing on collocations would help them in avoiding such mistakes.
8. It is important for teachers to help their students to avoid learning single words and collocations by memorizing them. A proper and effective alternative would be learning by visual methods and regular usage of what they learn.
9. It is important for teachers to give learners freedom of choosing a topic to discuss and talk about would encourage them to speak more and ultimately their oral skills improve.
10. Dictionaries, online concordances, and authentic texts are reliable sources of finding new collocations. Besides, watching movies in English, socializing with English native speakers, could be helpful in finding and learning collocations.
11. Regarding usage of collocations, extensive reading and writing help learners to retrieve collocations which they have learned when they need to use them in their speaking or writing.

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