Collocation as a Figurative Style: Data Analysis, Discussions, and Findings

Mahasin Ahmed M. Salih and Mahmoud Ali Ahmed
Sudan University of Science and Technology

Abstract
This paper aims at exploring the data analysis, discussions, and findings. It refers to reading comprehension as a bridge for mastering English language. The researcher has adopted the experimental, the descriptive and the analytical method via the questionnaire and the pre and posttest as tools for gathering the data concerning the study. The sample for this study composed (24) students studied English at the third year at Sudan University of Science and Technology(SUST) College of Education and (50) teachers who responded to the questionnaire selected purposively from different Sudanese Universities and colleges according to their experience. The data obtained from the test and the questionnaire has been rearranged into tables, analyzed and treated statistically using tables and graphs.
1. Introduction

English language is the lingua franca for the majority of the world population. It is the language for communication, through reading, speaking, listening and writing. It represents a big challenge for EFL learners to overcome the difficulties they face and to approach native like fluency.

Sudanese learners of English (SLE) at university levels face difficulties in English vocabulary especially on collocation knowledge. The researcher investigated some Sudanese teachers of English language about the importance of teaching collocations at university levels. They assure its importance but the benefit depends on what and how it is taught. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to suppose that SLE can improve their four skills through learning the components of vocabulary such as collocations.

This study has raised three questions:

1. To what extent does collocation instruction has any role on enhancing reading comprehension?
2. How can the recent resources and approaches enrich vocabulary knowledge?
3. To what extent does comprehending language in chunks lead to reading comprehension?

The above cited questions were transferred into three hypothetical statements as follows:

1. Collocation instruction has a big role on enhancing the students’ reading comprehension.
2. Recent resources and approaches enrich vocabulary knowledge.
3. Comprehending language in chunks leads to comprehending reading.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to meet the following objectives:

1. Demonstrating that language use requires collocation knowledge.
2. Increasing the awareness of the importance of learning collocation for university students.
3. Suggesting some approaches and materials that lead to proficient reading comprehension in relation to collocation.
4. Studying the relationship between students’ vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Collocation in Enhancing Comprehension

A number of researchers emphasized the role of collocation in the development of vocabulary competence. (Cowie, 1992; Lewis, 1997; & Nattinger, 1988) confirm the role of collocation in the development of vocabulary competence and in enhancing the students’ comprehension for
the association of words which assist the learner in using language in chunks by predicting what words may be found together. Before them Brown (1974) claims that collocation develops learners’ oral communication, listening and reading speed and make them notice how native speakers use their language. Hill (2000:53) stated that collocation is important because the way words combine in collocation is fundamental to all language use. More researchers and language teachers (Conzett, Hill, Lewis, & Woolard (2000) state the value of collocation and suggest useful methods of teaching collocation. They emphasize the importance of reading and the use of language chunks. They also agree that collocation allows students to think more quickly and communicate more efficiently. It also make thinking easier because it simplify complex ideas (ibid).

Other researchers confirm the importance of collocation instruction in improving not only learners’ lexical competence but also their grammatical proficiency. Hunston and Francis, (1998:11) state that syntax, lexis and meaning are completely patterned. Simple item vocabulary structure will only focus on the development of lexical knowledge, while collocation structure will include the growth of syntactic knowledge and both are interdependent.

(Benson, 1985; Cowie, 1981; & Lewis 1997) agree on reaching collocation to non-native speakers as it provides ready-made chunks of the language and improve their performance. Brown (1974:43) as cited in Namvar pointed out that collocation knowledge positively makes an impact upon learners reading and listening comprehension and their oral communication, and that teaching collocation makes learners capable of being aware of language chunks used by native speakers in speech and writing.

Nation (2001) stated that collocation is important to achieve fluency and accuracy in language production, “all fluent and appropriate language requires collocation knowledge”. Hashimi (2012:42) concluded that EFL college students, high school students and professors lack collocation knowledge because it has been neglected in classrooms.

Collocations are there for significant and unique, and its usefulness appears in improving fluency and help learners use language in chunks to approach native speakers’ proficiency. Crowther, (1997) defines collocation as “a combination of words in a language that happens very often and more frequent than would happen by chance. He distinguishes between collocations and the fixed syntax of idioms and other phrases e.g. in English we can say “beige car” but not “beige hair” and “blonde hair” not “blonde car” because “beige” collocates with “car “not with “hair” and “blonde” with “hair” not with “car”.

According to Firth (1968:181) “collocations of a given word are statements of habitual or customary places of that word”. He proposes that the meaning of words is gained from their co-occurrence of texts. Cruse (1986:36) simply defined collocations as “sequence of lexical items which habitually co-occur”. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) point out that a collocation unit
include a “node” that co-occur with a “span” of words on either side. They define collocations as “string of specific lexical items” such as lanced butter and curry favor that co-occur with a mutual expectancy greater than chance.

DeGlopper and Nation (2001) point out that collocations and chunked expressions reduce learners’ cognitive effort, processing time and facilitate immediate use. Lewis (2000) explains that collocations can shorten the time necessary to produce expressions and also facilitate fluency. Advanced they students do not become more fluent by being given lots of opportunities to be fluent. They become more fluent when they acquire more chunks of language for instant retrieval. Lewis (2001:49) points out that out that within the mental lexicon, collocation is the most powerful force in the creation and comprehension of all naturally occurring texts. That is to say, it is the magic force which enhance students’ reading and writing ability.

Nattinger and DiCarrico (1992), Sosa and McFarlane (2002), Wray (2000) agreed on the important of lexical pattern and collocation knowledge on helping students think more quickly and communicate more efficiently. They have studied how the acquisition of collocation may affect second language learners whether they approached this from a semantic, syntactic, or pedagogical perspective and that they should not be neglected because they can be a crucial part of native speakers’ communicative competence. Milton (2009:3) comments that vocabulary is not an elective or in significant component in the language acquisition process insomuch as “words are the building block of language and without them there is no language”. O’Dell (1997, cited in Al-Banna and Al-Khayri( nd)stated that through out the 1970s and 1980s, vocabulary and lexis were neglected by linguists, syllabuses, and language teaching theories. That is due to the linguists’ great emphasis on syntax and phonology over vocabulary. By the beginning of the 1980s, great interest in vocabulary teaching and the recognition of the role of vocabulary in language acquisition started to appear (Dicarrico 2001). Nation (2001) introduced a complete description of the range of word knowledge. He classified word knowledge into form, meaning, and use. Unlike collocation (or use) word form and word meaning have received

3. Theories of Teaching Vocabulary

3.1 Collocation Competence

Hill demonstrates that collocation competence is the native speakers’ competence and ability that allow them to use the appropriate collocates which is considered a problem for other learners,
even the advanced learners often make unacceptable collocations. Native speakers can say *she has a beige car* but not *she has a beige hair* that is because certain adjectives collocate with hair. For example, the adjective *blond* usually collocates with *hair* not with *cars* and vice-versa. Lewis, (2010:49).

The relationship between blond and hair is very strong but beige, brown or yellow and hair has a relatively weak relationship so, collocation is considered to be a combination of two or more words which frequently occur together. If someone says: "the girl with yellow hair" his/her saying could be clear but it is not what would be normally said in English. "the girl with blond hair" is the natural and correct usage, because blond collocates with hair, while yellow collocates with flowers or paints. As a result, collocation competence is essential and the lack of this competence pushes the learners to make grammatical mistakes and longer utterances. The analysis of the learners’ speech and writing reveal that they do not know how to express their ideas precisely, and how to use de-lexicalized verbs such as get, put, do, make, bring and take in their speech and writing. This problem can be solved by focusing on the central word and the words it collocates.

Students therefore, should use different techniques for searching a text such as dictionaries, corpus or computer concordance to expand their mental lexicon.

### 4. Reading Comprehension and Collocation

#### 4.1 Introduction

The definition of the term reading is not restricted and clear cut. Different people use the term reading in different ways. It can be to run the eyes between the written lines to understand a message, to interpret meaning or to get the sense of what is written in a text.

#### 4.2 Reasons for Reading

There are different reasons for reading, people may read because they want to get something from the writing, to get the message the writer has expressed, or to use reading outside the class room. The reason for reading may also be to pronounce a word, to identify a piece of information in a written text, to decode or decipher. There are also authentic reasons for reading away from the reasons concerned with language learning (pronunciation or language structure) people read to get something from the writing (facts, ideas, enjoyments…etc). Nuttal, (1982:3).
According to Alderson (2000), the nature of reading is not clear according to the sheer number of researches that carried out in this field. Similarly, the number of different theories of reading is simply overwhelming. What is reading, how it is acquired and taught, how reading in L2 differs from reading in L1, how reading relates to other cognitive and perceptual abilities, and how it is interfaces with memory. All these aspects of reading are important but will probably never be brought out together into a coherent and comprehensive of what it is we do when we read. Since what we read must have some relation to how we read, then text analysis must be relevant to theories of reading and to research into reading (ibid).

4.3 How Reading Improves Languages

To improve reading, students have to read more intensively because reading widely is an effective means of extending our command of languages whether the first or the second one. Some students may need to improve their languages “to deal with overseas customers “or to keep up to date with current researches in different topics” but their purpose has nothing to do with languages as much. The purpose here is to achieve with non-linguistic purpose, Nuttal, (1982:19).

Students with the ability to improve their reading comprehension will recognize the importance of reading on their own and struggle to achieve it. They have to develop the ability to read on their own, an independent reader must be able to tackle texts he has never seen before (ibid).

Flexible reading speed help students to be competent readers, but fast reading is preferred if it can be done without loss of effectiveness. This must be achieved with enough understanding of the text to suit the purpose of reading. It is not necessary to understand every word or to achieve complete understanding.

Reading helps to know words in a repetitive way which leads to fix these words in the lexicon i.e. enriches the students’ vocabulary knowledge. It displays words in context which enables students to use words in a real context.

Reading exposes readers to collocations and helps to learn language in chunks Crystal, (1992).

5. Materials and Methods

This study was carried out at Sudan University of Science and Technology, college of education with students studying English in the third year. The purposive sample used for this study includes (24) students aged between21-29. They speak Arabic bas first language and all majoring in English. This may reveal the reason behind their need to enhance their reading comprehension via using collocation. They studied English for about 10 years and they have been exposed to
different types of EFL syllabi for example the spine series at the basic and higher secondary level. At university level, they studied grammar, vocabulary, literature, phonetic and phonology, syntax, morphology and reading.

The sample of instructors also includes (50) instructors from different English departments in Sudan such as Sudan University of Science and Technology Faculty of Languages, Khartoum University Faculty of Education and Faculty of Arts, Omdurman Islamic University and Mugtaribeen University. They are all holders of degrees in English language; MA, PhD, and pros holders. They filled in a 15 itemed questionnaire.

5.1 Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

Validity refers to the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to measure. Before being given to the study individuals, the questionnaire has been judged and and approved by a number of English teachers who have been long experienced in the field of ELT in general and applied linguistics in particular. The researcher has used alpha equation to calculate the reliability coefficient of the scale in the questionnaire and came out with the following results:

\[ Validity = \sqrt{Reliability} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result in the table above show that all reliability and validity coefficient of the questionnaire are greater than (50)% and very close to one . This explains that the questionnaire is characterized by high reliability and validity. Therefore it reflects credibility of statistical analysis.

Tools of the Study

The researcher used the test as a tool to gather the data for this study. The test was administered to (24) students as a purposive sample who were tested in collocation knowledge. The researcher used the experimental method in conducting this study.
6. Results and Discussion

The researcher used the test as the main tool for collecting the data related to this study. The researcher has designed a pretest and a posttest to measure whether students can progress in using collocation to enhance their reading comprehension.

The table below illustrates what has been stated above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>16.83</td>
<td>4.348</td>
<td>-4.633</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>21.47</td>
<td>3.830</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2019

From the above table, The P-value of T-test (0.000) is less than significant level (0.01) that mean there is statistical difference between pre-test and post-test for post-test.

7. Conclusion & Recommendation

In conclusion, reading comprehension is an incremental process and collocations can facilitate this process. Collocations were approved to result in better performance in reading comprehension. The results of the data analysis collected by the teachers’ questionnaire prove that Sudanese students at university level have problems in collocation knowledge. The results collected from the second instrument (i.e. the students pre and posttest) also proved that Sudanese EL students face real problems when using collocations. The results gathered from the analysis and discussion of the data obtained from the students’ test support the evidence of the teachers’ questionnaire.

According to the objectives of this study and the answers to the research questions, the researcher makes the following recommendations addressing the syllabus designers, the teachers of English language at university level and EL learners:

1. Syllabus designers should include more practice on collocation.

2. English language teachers should concentrate on using words in combination rather than isolated words.
3. EFL learners should always create different methods of learning collocations.

4. Future studies can explore whether collocation help lower levels of ESL/EFL learners more than higher levels in text comprehension.

5. The researcher can review studies on the effects of other types of collocation on text comprehension.

6. Further L2 research is needed to examine different strategies deployed by L2 learners in different vocabulary conditions.

7. Future L2 studies might investigate the effect of cognitive style on collocation competence.

8. Finally, further studies should be conducted among EFL teachers to pinpoint what and how they teach collocation.

References


EL-Banna, M. Gaballa, Dr. Mohamed, A. Alkhayri Vice Presidency for Higher Studies & Academic Research & Dean of Information Technology, Taif University: Testing Collocational Knowledge of Taif University English Seniors.

Brown, P. R. (1994) Lexical Collocation: A strategy for Advanced Learners in Modern English Teacher vol. 3, No2


Dicarrico, (2001) Learning Vocabulary in Another Language

Firth, J.R (1986) What is Corpus Linguistics?


Nattinger, (1988) Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching


Sosa and McFarlane, (2002) Influence on the Acquisition of L2 Collocation

Sosa and McFarlane, (2007) Acquisition and Communication

Wray, A (2000) Teaching Collocation in EFL Classroom