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**ASSESSING THE COLLOCATIONAL  
COMPETENCE OF ENGLISH EFL**

**:A Case study of Third Year LMD Students of English at  
M'sila University**

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master**

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## **DECLARATION**

*We confirm that this research thesis is our original work and has not been*

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*The thesis has been complemented by referenced works duly  
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*Karouche Samiha*

*Korichi Imane*

## ***DEDICATION***

*This work is dedicated specially to my mother and my father, who have shown me what nobody else would ever have shown, and have provided me with their encouragement, love and understanding.*

*This work is also dedicated to my sisters Meriem, Ismahane, Fatima Alzahra and Linda for their whole-hearted support;*

*To all my extended family.*

*To all my friends and teachers at the University of M'sila and Biskra.*

*To all those who have been supportive, caring and patient, sometimes beyond their strength, I dedicate this simple work,*

*Karouche Samiha*

## ***DEDICATION***

*Lovingly, I dedicate this dissertation to:*

- *My beloved mother, there is no doubt in my mind that without her continued advice and support I could not have completed this work.*
  
- *My dear father, sisters and brothers.*
  
- *To my husband, who encouraged and gave confidence to accomplish this work.*
  
- *To my dear mother in law, my sons, my relatives and my friends.*

*Korichi Imane*

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*our appreciation extends to all the members of the Jury who would examine our dissertation.*

## **Abstract**

Despite its prime importance for language proficiency, collocational competence is one of the most neglected areas in vocabulary studies and second language learning and teaching. This negligence is the underlying reason for writing the present research. Hence, the research paper aims at assessing students' collocational competence and raising awareness of the importance of this significant dimension of vocabulary knowledge and presenting a well-rounded view of this lexical phenomenon. To this end, the paper gives a concise introduction to the topic, and offers an overview of relevant classification and definitions of collocations. This is followed by different approaches to define it and its importance for language learning. The last part presents an assessment for 3<sup>rd</sup> year LMD student's collocational knowledge, concluded by a number of recommendations that English language instructors can implement in their classroom. Special tests were designed to assess collocational competence. The results showed that the collocational competence of third year LMD students at the department of English was generally unsatisfactory.

**Keywords:** collocational competence, second language learning, English language teaching.

### **List of abbreviations:**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ESL:** English as a Second Language

**FL:** Foreign Language

**L1:** First Language

**L2:** Second Language

**SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

**TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language

**e.g:** example

**%:** percentage

**Vs.:** versus

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# ***INTRODUCTORY***

## ***CHAPTER***

## **Introduction**

### **Background of the Research Project**

As David Wilkins observed many years ago, 'Without grammar little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.' The single most crucial task facing EFL learners is acquiring a sufficiently large vocabulary. We now recognize that much of our 'vocabulary' consists of prefabricated chunks of different types.

After long years of neglect in language teaching and learning, the acquisition of vocabulary attracted attention in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the attention has been increasingly on the rise ever since. This came as a result of a relatively recent realization that vocabulary is a significant component in language learning and that “words are the building blocks of language and without them there is no language,” (Milton, 2009, p. 3). There is an assumption that the more words a learner knows, the richer the learner’s vocabulary knowledge is. However, vocabulary knowledge means more than just knowing the meaning of a word in isolation; rather it means how far a learner knows the combinatory possibilities of that word, that, knows the words which co-occur with it.

Collocations have increasingly attracted researchers’ attention over the past few years (Barfield & Gyllstad, 2009). Scholars such as Pawley and Syder

(1983) and Wray (2002), among others, have convincingly demonstrated that collocations are important in foreign language (FL) contexts as they help users to achieve fluency and thus sound nativelike. Generally, this study is an attempt to assess 3<sup>rd</sup> year students' knowledge of English collocations.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

Collocations have been recognized as one of the ways that differentiate native speakers and second language learners. When a non-native speaker wants to help someone, she/he will say: "Can I help you?" whereas a native speaker will say: "Can I lend you a hand?". It is one of the most problematic areas for foreign language learning. It is often seen as arbitrary and overwhelming, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of native-like fluency. It is believed that automation of collocations helps native speakers to express themselves fluently since it provides 'chunks' of English that are ready to use. Foreign language learners, however, because of lacking this automation, may make non-native errors when producing utterances. McCarthy, 1998; Lewis, 2000; Nation, 2001 presume that language knowledge is collocational knowledge; therefore, teaching collocations should be a top priority in every language course. Our personal observation is that LMD students at our university, just like all L2 learners, struggle with the use of collocations as native speakers do.

Recently, testing collocational knowledge has been gaining increasing attention from researchers in the field of foreign language (L2) assessment and instruction (Gyllstad 2007; Webb & Sasao, 2013). As collocations have become of interest in L2 instruction, demand for L2 collocation tests is increasing to measure learning. Before being able to design any intervention study to teach collocations, it is first necessary to test L2 learners' collocational competence. This research will therefore constitute an attempt to assess EFL learners' knowledge of English collocations so that decisions can be made in terms of their teaching.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of the present study is assessing the collocational competence of EFL learners in order to have a clear idea on L2 learners' level and mastering of collocational competence.

The general aim of this study is assess students' English collocational knowledge .This aim may be sub-divided into the following objectives:

- Exploring the term Collocations and its importance in EFL classrooms.
- Assessing EFL learners' knowledge of English collocations to raise EFL learners' consciousness towards collocations.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is important considering the significance of collocational competence itself. Nation (2001) stated that “all fluent and appropriate language requires collocational knowledge” (p. 318). For El-Dakhs (2015), collocational competence is a key component of second language learning for a variety of reasons. The first is their high frequency of occurrence in discourse, estimated at 70% of everything we say, hear, read, or write (Hill, 2000). Also, they contribute to understanding word meaning like the word “heavy” varies based on its collocates in “heavy meal,” “heavy smoker,” “heavy traffic,” and “heavy man.” In addition to the importance of collocational competence, the present study also gains significance from its goals and design. Analyzing the participants’ errors will also help understand the types of common collocational errors among EFL learners. Hence, the results of the study could prove useful to educational institutions in the EFL classes.

## **Research Questions**

Collocations are one of the challenges that second language learners have to face in their journey of English language learning. They often come across many difficulties in all language skills. These difficulties vary in their intensity and nature depending on a variety of variables such as the students' background, age, personality, and native language (L1). Thus, this study attempts to test the collocational knowledge of EFL to find out whether collocation is neglected on

EFL classes or not? It addresses three questions with relevance to third year LMD students at the department of English at Msila University.

1. What is their level of third year LMD students collocational competence?
2. What are the types of collocational difficulties the learners encounter?
3. Which types of collocation constitute the most challenging for learners?

The results will be insightful in terms of deciding the level of intervention required through teaching. Therefore, to answer these questions, we will assess students' collocational competence through collmatch (collocational match) test.

### **Previous Research**

In most languages, there exists a sort of 'natural order' in which words are arranged or related to one another in sentences. In English language, this is known as collocation.

Lately, the study of collocation in second and foreign language learning has been of uttermost concern to linguists and researchers in general. According to R.H. Robins, studies on collocative meaning began 2,300 years ago in Greece. Yvonne Müller states that the term collocation comes from the Latin verb collocare to arrange or to set in order. The notion of collocation has been familiar since the pioneering work of Harold E. Palmer (1938) who was the first to introduce the term collocation in his dictionary, 'A Grammar of English Words'. Although the birth of this lexical semantic term was at the hand of

Palm, it was later developed by Firth (1957), who named this concept “collocation” as a technical term. Firth (1957, p. 196) used the example of dark night as an adjective + noun collocation and asserted that one of the meanings of night is its collocability with dark, and one of the meanings of dark is its collocability with night. In other words, he thought that collocates of word help us understand its meaning.

Lyons (1966), on the other hand, seemed critical of Firth’s argument that a ‘word's collocations are of its meaning’. Based on a distributional theory of meaning, an alternative view posits that the meaning of collocation cannot be understood from all the components of the expression within which the collocation appears, and that part of the meaning of one word in the collocation does not depend on its collocability, association with the other word(s).

However, he later explained that: There is frequency so high a degree of interdependence between lexemes which tend to occur in texts in collocation with one another that their potentiality for collocation is reasonably described as being part of their meaning (Lyons, 1977, p. 613). This means that Lyons later rejected his opposite view and accepted Firth's theory of meaning.

A number of linguists, known as Neo-Firthians, adapted Firth’s theory and expanded it. Halliday (1966) considered lexis as complementary to, but not part of, grammatical theory. He introduced the notion of ‘*set*’ as an extra dimension of the collocability of words. A collocation, in his definition, is “a

linear co-occurrence relationship among lexical items which co-occur together”, whereas the *set* is “the grouping of members with like privilege of occurrence in collocation” (p. 153). For example, *bright, hot, shine, light,* and *come out* belong to the same lexical set since they all collocate with the word *sun* (1966, p. 158). Sinclair (1966, p. 411) In order to clarify the structure of a collocation, Sinclair distinguished between three items: node, span and collocate. They used the term *Node* to refer to a lexical item whose collocations are being studied, *Span* to refer to the number of lexical items on either side of the node that are considered to be relevant to the node, and *Collocates* to refer to those items that are in the environment defined by the span. For example, when we study the collocational patterns of 'tea', 'tea' is the node. If we decide to have a span of 3, that means we study the 3 lexical items that occur before and after 'tea'. All the lexical items that are within the span of the word 'tea' are considered to be its collocates. Michael Hoey (2004) proposed that collocation is just the prime example of the more general principle of priming in language .He explains that lexical items are not only primed for occurrence with other individual words, but also with semantically similar sets of words and certain pragmatic functions or moves, with grammatical constructions, as well as with textual structure. Many linguists tried to limit the scope of collocation definition in order to understand well such linguistic phenomenon.

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## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Since the present study aims at testing the collocational competence of LMD learners, it adopts a descriptive research design. Within this design, the target population was specified as third year LMD students at Mohamed Boudiaf M'sila and a test is designed that would tap into their collocational knowledge.

### **The Method**

The data collected in such research will be significantly based on the quantitative method as a most suitable way to explore the students' levels of collocations knowledge. Quantitative measurement will allow us to know the level of difficulty with collocations which learners encounter. Also, this will be followed by a qualitative assessment to address the research questions 2 and 3 by citing examples of most challenging areas in collocations' acquisitions.

### **Participants**

The population of our research is third year students at the department of letters and English language, at Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'Sila during the academic year 2017/2018. In this study we have chosen randomly one group of third year LMD students consisting of 50 students.

## **Procedure**

Students were tested during their regular English class. The instructions were given in English and they had 90 minutes to do the test. The test was done anonymously. It was paper and pencil based and students had enough time to reply to the designed tasks.

## **Data Collection and Instrumentations**

To answer our questions and fulfill our objectives, and as concerns data collection tools, we have prepared a collmatch test for 3<sup>rd</sup> year students at Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'Sila. The researchers intend to use the descriptive method to interpret the results which were recorded in the form of tables, percentages and numbers. Data classification was done manually by the researchers.

**CHAPTER ONE: Reviewing  
and Understanding  
Collocations**

## **Introduction**

Though its major importance for language proficiency, collocational competence is one of areas most neglected in studies of vocabulary and second language learning and teaching. This is the reason for writing the present chapter through which we will try to clarify the notion of collocations through a short review of its origin, and its developments. The chapter will be citing its most significant definitions according to two specified approaches; the statistical approach and the traditional one. In addition, we present collocations patterns and types; we point out the position of collocations among other phraseological concepts: idioms, free combinations, compound and phrasal verbs, colligation and prosody. Finally, we clarify the importance of collocations in vocabulary and language teaching, without neglecting the problems that learners face in acquiring collocational knowledge. Also, we deal with both communicative and “collocational competence” which is a new expression in collocation teaching introduced by Lewis Michael in 2000.

## 1. 1 Collocations' Origin and its Development

The origin of the term collocation is the Latin verb collocare, which means to set in order/ to arrange (Müller, 2008, p. 1).

The notion of collocation has been frequent since the pioneering work of Palmer (1938) who was the first to insert the term collocation in his dictionary, 'A Grammar of English Words'. However, Firth (1957) promoted the word collocation as a technical term so that meaning by collocation became established as one of his 'modes of meaning' when he said: "I propose to bring forward as a technical term, meaning by collocation, and apply the test of collocability" (Firth, 1957, p. 194).

Later, Firth (1957, p. 196) used the example of *dark night* as an adjective + noun collocation and confirmed that one of the meanings of night is its collocability with dark, and one of the meanings of dark is its collocability with night. In other words, he thought that collocates of a word help us understand its meaning. He considered the word that needs clarification, here night, the node word and the words that could be combined with it collocates.

Lyons (1966) appeared critical of Firth's argument that a 'word's collocations are of its meaning'. Based on a distributional theory of meaning, an alternative view posits that the meaning of collocation cannot be understood from all the components of the expression within which the collocation appears, and that

part of the meaning of one word in the collocation does not depend on its collocability, association with the other word(s). However, he later explained that:

“There is frequency so high a degree of interdependence between lexemes which tend to occur in texts in collocation with one another that their potentiality for collocation is reasonably described as being part of their meaning”(as cited in Lyons, 1977, p. 613). Lyons later rejected his opposite view and accepted Firth's theory of meaning.

Firth's statistical approach to collocation is accepted by many corpus linguists including, for example, Halliday (1966), Greenbaum (1974), Wong Fillmore (1976), Nattinger (1980), Sinclair (1991), Partington (1998), Wilson (2001), and Hunston (2002). All of these linguists, known as Neo-Firthians, follow Firth in that they argue that collocation refers to the characteristic co-occurrence of patterns of words. For instance, Halliday (1966, p.148) considered lexis as complimentary to, but not part of, grammatical theory.

Sinclair (1966, p. 411) stated that language patterns are treated, in grammar, as if they could be described by a system of choices. The issue is the tendencies of lexical items to collocate with one another. These tendencies “ought to tell us facts about language that cannot be got by grammatical analysis”. He then indicated that the contract between lexical items is more flexible than that of grammatical classes because “there are virtually no impossible collocations, but some are much more likely than others” (as cited in Gitsaki, 1999, p. 6).

Michael Hoey (2004) stated that not only the lexical but also the grammatical and textual organization of sentences and texts base on the very principle of expectancy or predictability, underlying the Firthian idea of collocation. According to Hoey, collocation, besides a statistical fact, is also a psycholinguistic reality. Therefore, collocation can be seen as a general term covering all syntagmatic relations. We conclude that each lexical item is primed for particular collocational use, for example, today is primed to occur in newspaper texts (Hoey, 2005, pp. 1-16).

However, many linguists tried to limit the scope of collocation definition in order to understand well such linguistic phenomenon. Next, we point out this controversial view in details.

## **1.2 Definition of Collocations**

Since the early introduction of the notion of “collocation” by Palmmer (1938) and its first use as a technical term by Firth (1957), a number of definitions have been advanced for the term.

John Rupert Firth introduces the term collocation into linguistic theory as part of his theory of meaning. He indicates (1957, p. 196) that meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level and is not directly concerned with the conceptual or idea approach to the meaning of words. One of the meanings of a word is its collocability with another word (dark night). According to Firth (1957, p. 181), 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. Moreover, the collocation of a word or a ‘piece’ is not to be regarded “mere juxtaposition, it is an order of mutual expectancy”. Then, Sinclair (1970) defines it as: “The occurrence of two items in a context within a specified environment. Significant collocation is a regular collocation between two items, such that they co-occur more often than their respective frequencies” (as cited in Hori, 2004, p. 5).

Sinclair in 1966 defined collocation as the co-occurrence of two items, then, in 1970 he defined it through his distinction between casual and significant collocations. In this respect, an important feature in Sinclair’s theory is that he distinguishes between casual and significant collocations. Unlike casual collocation, a significant collocation is a collocation that occurs more frequently than would be expected on the basis of the individual items.

Halliday (1976) defines collocation under the framework of lexis and suggests that collocation is the syntagmatic relation of linear co-occurrence among lexical items, which co-occur together with some measures of significant proximity, either with a scale or at least by a cut-off point. Halliday’s definition was adopted by Sinclair (1991) in his book: *Corpus, Concordance, and Collocation*.

Greenbaum (1974) disputes that collocation' study should not only be based on Halliday's item-oriented approach but also on an integrated approach which integrates both local syntactic structures and sentence patterns.

Moreover, collocation is defined as "how words typically occur with one another" by Carter and McCarthy (1988, p. 32) also as "a group of words which occur repeatedly in a language" (Carter, 1992, p. 51) and as "the ways in which words regularly occur near each other" (Diegnan et al., 1998, p. 35).

A number of definition has been advanced for the term collocations clear and well -phrased definition is Lewis (1997) who explained that "collocations are those combination of words which occur naturally with greater than random frequency"(p. 44). Hence, collocations refer to word combinations that occur consistently together.

### **1.3 Approaches to Define Collocations**

Two approaches to define collocations could be distinguished: the Statistical/ Frequency-based Approach or "the phraseological approach" (Nesselhauf, 2005, p. 12) and the Traditional Approach. The first approach is called also "statistically oriented approach" by Herbst (as cited in Nesselhauf, p. 14). Attempts by linguists to define the term collocation have resulted in various definitions. We have tried to classify the most common ones under each approach.

### **1.3.1 The Statistical / Frequency-Based Approach**

This approach has its roots in the “phraseological approach” (Nesselhauf, N. 2005, p. 12). Under this approach, there are common definitions which we chronologically order as follows:

1- “Collocation is the statistical tendency of words to co-occur.” (Hunston, 2002, p. 12) 2- “...the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text” (Sinclair, as cited in Nesselhauf, 2005, p. 12)

2- “...the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text” (Sinclair, cited in Nesselhauf, 2005, p. 12)

### **1.3.2 The Traditional Approach**

Unlike the Statistical / Frequency-based Approach, the Traditional one approaches collocations from a lexical point of view. It is concerned with combining two or more words. The two approaches are complementary. The following are the most popular definitions given to collocation under this approach:

1- “When two words co-occur, or are used together frequently, they are said to collocate” (Gairns & Redman, S. 1986, p. 36).

2- “How words typically occur with one another” (Carter & McCarthy, 1988, p. 32).

3-“A collocation, in its simplest definition, consists of two words which are linked together in the memory of native speakers and occur together with some frequency in both written and oral discourse” (Aghbar, 1990, as cited in Hsu, 2008, p. 182).

4- “collocation has long been the name given to the relationship a lexical item has with items that appear with greater than random probability in its (contextual) context” (Hoey, 1991, as cited in Partington 1998, p. 16).

5- “...a group of words which occur repeatedly in a language” (Carter, 1992, p. 47).

6-“Collocation is the way words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing.” (Oxford Collocations Dictionary, 2002, p. vii)

7-“A collocation is a pair or group of words that are often used together” (McCarthy & O’Dell, 2005, p. 6).

8- “we define collocations as two words belonging to different grammatical categories to exclude binomials where the two words are from the same category and are connected implicitly or explicitly by a conjunction (e.g. and, or) or a preposition such as "in" or "by" (e.g. push and shove, sick and tired, here and there, in and out, life and death, hand in hand, dead or alive)” (Abdelmoneim, 2005, p. 118).

From the above definitions, given under each approach, we notice that there is no single definition of the word “collocation”. However, in spite of the

difference in approaching and defining collocations there is a common agreement among all the linguists/pedagogists that collocations are two or more words combined together continuously. For example, the expression “fast food” is called "collocation" because the word *fast* 'co-locates' or 'co-occurs' frequently in the same location as the word *food*. Thus, teaching collocations is much advocated because it may lead to natural writing/speaking. Other examples may include collocations like: ‘deliver a speech’ and ‘make a decision’. This does not mean that all co-occurring items can be considered as collocations since there are many word combinations that go together but they are not considered as collocations because collocations are only one type of word combination. For instance we exclude from collocations binomials (as explained by Abdelmoneim in definition n°: 8) and compound nouns such as ‘post-office’, ‘swimming pool’ and ‘dry-cleaning’. Also, phrasal verbs like ‘get up’, ‘carry on’ are classified under grammatical collocations since there are two types of collocations

## 1.4 Collocations' Patterns

We have classified the most common patterns in the following two tables according to Lewis (2000, p. 133) and McCarthy and O' Dell (2005, p. 12)

<b>Adjective + noun</b>	a difficult decision
<b>Verb + noun</b>	submit a report
<b>Noun + noun</b>	radio station
<b>Verb + adverb</b>	examine thoroughly
<b>Adverb + adjective</b>	extremely inconvenient
<b>Verb + adjective + noun</b>	revise the original plan
<b>Noun + verb</b>	the fog closed in

Table 1.1 Collocations' Patterns according to Lewis, M (2000: 133)

<b>Adjective + noun</b>	bright colour
<b>Noun + verb</b>	the economy boomed
<b>Noun + noun</b>	a sense of pride
<b>Verb + preposition + noun</b>	filled with horror
<b>Verb + adverb</b>	smiled proudly
<b>Adverb + adjective</b>	happily married

Table 1.2 Collocations' Patterns according to McCarthy and O' Dell (2005, p. 12)

We observe that Michael Lewis' patterns are nearly similar to McCarthy and O' Dell's ones. As we observe in the two tables above, we notice that in both classifications there are the following patterns: **adjective + noun, noun + noun, verb + adverb, noun + verb** and **adverb + adjective**.

We agree with McCarthy and O' Dell that "There are many types of collocations" (2005, p. 12) since there are nine parts of speech: noun, adjective, adverb, verb, preposition, conjunction, article, pronoun and interjection. The first five parts could be combined to form collocations.

## **1.5 Collocations' Types**

Linguists and lexicographers present wide variety of collocations; each scholar has divided them according to different dimensions. Some of them have considered their strength, others their use...etc. The most common types are discussed below.

### **1.5.1 Lexical Vs (Versus) Grammatical Collocations**

According to Michael Lewis, collocations are either lexical or grammatical (2000, p. 134). The difference between grammatical and lexical collocations is that the former includes a principal word that is an adjective, a verb or a noun and a grammatical word which is usually a preposition (Benson, 1989, p. 593) whereas the latter does not include grammatical words like prepositions, it consist only of

lexical words and they may be more difficult to learn. Consequently, phrasal verbs such as *carry on*, *give up*...etc are considered as grammatical collocations.

### 1.5.2 Open Vs Restricted Collocations

Cowie and Howarth (1996, p. 81) distinguish two types of collocations: ‘*open*’ and ‘*restricted*’. According to them, a collocation is considered as *open* when one or both parts has/have a ‘figurative meaning’ such as “*white man*” referring to “skin color”, whereas a collocation is *restricted* if its parts ‘keep their literal meaning’, for instance “*vested interest*”.

### 1.5.3 Strong Vs Weak Collocations

Distinguishing collocations according to strength refers to the degree of words’ association. Some words co-occur so often that when a word shows, its collocate follows it most of the time. Thus, it is qualified as a “strong collocation”. But when two words collocate rarely, the strength reduces and the collocation is not strong enough for the collocate to be predicted since the words are not always together.

Hill (as cited in Lewis, 2000, p. 63) classifies collocations according to strength into four categories: unique, *strong*, *weak* and *Medium*-strength collocations.

First, there are ***unique collocations***. As examples, Hill gives the two collocations “*footthe bill*” and “*shrug your shoulders*”. The two collocations are unique because the verbs “foot” and “shrug” are not used with any other nouns. Secondly,

there are **strong collocations** like “*trenchant criticism*” and “*rancid butter*”. These are not unique because there are other things that can be trenchant or rancid, but these collocations are very few. Thirdly, there are **weak collocations**: to illustrate, adjectives like long, short, cheap, expensive, good or bad could be combined with many things (nouns) for instance *red car*. These combinations are “more predictable” and easy to the majority of students. Finally, the fourth type is **medium-strength collocations**; for example “*holds a conversation*” and “*a major operation*”. Hill (ibid) thinks that students are concerned with this type which is neither strong nor weak.

#### **1.5.4 Technical Vs Academic Collocations**

Technical collocations are different from lexical and grammatical collocations in that the former are used in a special field within a special register. i.e. ESP (English for Specific Purposes) to help the learners acquire a specific language usage and use. However, the latter are academic/General and could be used in both General English and ESP.

Furthermore, technical collocations are “powerful indicators of register” (Partington, 1998, p. 20). They are needed in “many genres of writing”. Each genre has its special collocations so that what is a normal collocation within a specific genre could not be considered so in another genre.

In this context, Fuentes and Curado (2001, p. 118) claim that “The level of technicality in word behavior is closely related to subject domain. The notable

condition is that elements function uniquely in their corresponding field, describing the restricted setting.” He clarifies his view with specific combinations of the noun *network* such as *access network*, *localarea network* (ibid). Also, technical collocations help in increasing the learner's potential to command special languages.

Therefore, we can say that technical collocations are register-dependent while semi-technical ones are related to scientific domains but they may be found in academic language. As a result, all the types are necessary in learning ESP but only academic collocations are useful in General English.

## **1.6 Collocations in Phraseology**

According to Gitsaki (1999), many linguists and scholars state that semantic transparency appears to be the only criterion that could make a difference between idioms and collocations though considering three main phraseological combinations -idioms, collocations, and free combinations –not only semantic transparency but also collocational restriction is regarded as an important criterion by many linguists (Aisenstadt, 1979; Benson, Benson & Ilson, 1986; Carter, 1987; Cowan, 1989; Cowie & Howarth, 1996). Furthermore, some linguists who agree with these two criteria to distinguish between idioms, collocations, and free combinations add one or two more criteria to differentiate these three combinations more clearly.

### **1.6.1 Collocations, Idioms and Free Combinations**

To understand clearly what lexical collocations are, it is helpful to distinguish them from idioms from one hand and from free combinations on the other hand. In one of the useful collocation dictionaries, *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: A Guide to Word Combinations* (2009), the word collocation is compared to other fixed expressions in the following definition:

“In English, as in other languages, there are many fixed identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Such groups of words are called recurrent combinations, fixed combinations, or collocations, collocations fall into two major groups: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations.”

(Benson et al, 2009, p. xix)

Moreover, criteria which are frequently applied to distinguish collocations from free combinations and idioms are fixedness and semantic opacity. Therefore, free combinations, in line with Sinclair’s open-choice principle, are sequences of words that follow rules of grammar and syntax of the language in question, and whose elements allow for free substitution. They are the least cohesive types of word combinations and the combination as a whole can be understood from the sum of the literal meanings of the elements. For example, the noun *murder* can be used with many verbs: to analyze, boast of, condemn, describe, disregard, film, forget, and remember and so on. These verbs, in turn, can be combined freely with other nouns: accident, adventure, discovery, event, experience, etc. Simply speaking, free word combinations have the properties

that each of the words can be replaced by another without seriously modifying the overall meaning of the lexical unit; and if one of the words is omitted, a reader or a listener cannot easily infer it from the remaining ones.

Idioms are relatively fixed and semantically opaque word combinations. The criterion of semantic opacity of idioms was defined by Sweet as early as 1899: “the meaning of each idiom is an isolated fact which cannot be inferred from the meaning of the words of which the idiom is made up” (as cited in Skandera, 2004, p. 24). In other words, idioms are made up of smaller group of word combinations and relatively frozen expressions whose meanings do not reflect the basic literal meanings of their constituents. When we give somebody the red carpet, for example, we do not actually hand over a red carpet to them, but rather give them a special treatment as important visitors.

Finally, collocations are loosely fixed pairings between free combinations and idioms. For example, commit murder is not an idiom because the meaning of the whole chunk reflects the meaning of the constituents. Also, this word combination is different from free combinations in two ways. Firstly, the synonymy of the verb is restricted, in this word combination, perpetrate seems to be the only synonym to replace commit. Secondly, and more importantly, the combination *commit murder* is used more frequently; it springs readily to mind; it is “fixed phrase” in English (Benson et al, 1986, p. 253).

There are, however, some lexical chunks such as *foot the bill* and *curry favour* which colligate collocations and idioms (Cowie, 1981, p. 228). These units are called bound collocations or transitional collocations (Cruse, 1986, pp. 41-46). Cruse explains that transitional collocations require a particular item in their immediate context. In other words, the constituents forming the transitional collocations are not likely to be separated. Transitional combinations are more frozen than ordinary collocations, i.e. less variable. However; unlike idioms these phrases seem to have a meaning close to that suggested by their component parts.

### **1.6.2. Collocations, Idioms and Phrasal Verbs**

These three terms are often used interchangeably. Therefore, it is interesting to point out the relation that may exist between them.

‘Phrasal templates’ are collocations which include very free elements within a restricted structure (prepositions used with other constituents, particularly numbers). These correspond to Renouf and Sinclair’s (1991) collocational frameworks and Nattinger and Decarrico’s phrasal constraints.

Phrasal verbs are very common in English, especially spoken English. A phrasal verb is a combination of words, that is used like a verb and consists of a verb and an adverb or preposition, for example give in or come up with. Each instance of these combinations has several common meanings. These meanings are often extensions from the core meaning and they may be abstract. Moreover,

a meaning of a phrasal verb is usually associated with a set of particular collocates within the sentence. For example, *complaints* is a collocate of *deal with* as in the sentence we had *to deal with* a lot of *complaints*. Also, the collocate *complaints* provides a clue to the appropriate meaning of *deal with* (Gledhill, 2000, p. 14). Phrasal verbs are often used in idioms. The meaning of an idiom is rarely understood (i.e. has a metaphoric sense). Similarly, the meaning of a phrasal verb is rarely guessed from the individual words. So, collocations are often idiomatic.

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Idioms and phrasal verbs are somehow identical to collocations because they include words that go together. However, the verb-preposition collocation, as marked by Quirk et al. (1989), consists of a lexical verb followed by a preposition with which it is semantically and / or syntactically associated, terming the combination a ‘prepositional verb’. Furthermore, the verb-preposition collocation is usually regarded as different from the phrasal verb in some respects. That is, in the former, the relevant particle always functions as a preposition, not as an adverb. The collocation retaining the original senses of the

relevant verb, and the verb preceding the preposition is usually intransitive (except for small cases).

## **1.7. Collocation and Other Phraseological Features**

### **1.7.1. Collocations and Compounds**

Many adjective + noun combinations are completely frozen combinations; no variations at all are possible. Such combinations are clearly identified from other combinations and are known as compounds (i.e. lexical elements consisting of more than one word) such as alternating current, definite article. Compounds may also consist of noun + noun combinations like aptitude test, blood count. A simple verb + one or two adverbs are so-called ‘compound verbs’. Moreover, compounds are technically referred to as ‘endocentric’ when the semantic head is inside the combination, i.e. the meaning of the whole combination characterizes the determination, for example, wet suit (a special type of suit) and prime minister (a special type of minister).

### **1.7.2. Collocation and Colligation**

The difference between the two terms “collocation” and “colligation” has to be pointed out. Colligation is the tendency not of a few particular words, but of any items from an entire grammatical sub-class, to co-occur with a specific lexical item as Butler (2004, p. 154) comments:

“Originally coined by Firth to mean the co-occurrence relationship between grammatical categories such as noun and adjective,[colligation is] now used more widely to cover relationship between grammatical categories and particular lexical words as well ” (as cited in Toolan, 2009, p. 19).

As mentioned in this definition, slightly differing from Firth’s understanding of lexical co-occurrence tendencies, each linguist is aware of the phenomenon of lexical co-occurrence in his own way,. Although collocation and colligation do not necessarily work in parallel, the relationship between the two can therefore be seen on a scale of generality. The notion of colligation operates at the grammatical level of meaning, however, has recently been extended to cover the syntactic constraints, or even just preferences of particular words. Firth (1957) in an attempt to clarify the difference between the two concepts, argues that collocations are actual words in habitual company. A word in a usual collocation stares you in the face just as it is; while colligation cannot be of words as such. Furthermore, colligations of grammatical categories related in a grammatical structure do not necessarily follow word divisions or even sub-divisions of words.

## **1.8. Collocation and Language Learning**

### **1.8.1. Vocabulary Teaching and Grammar Teaching**

In learning a foreign language, it is obvious that we have to learn both grammatical correctness and lexical component. However, in favour of

emphasis on syntactic structure in the tradition of language teaching, it is not surprising that vocabulary has often been considered only as a reading problem, Rudzka et al. (1981, p. i) indicate about the general tendency of EFL teaching, that vocabulary has been considered as “the area where relatively little has been done”. Also, Carter and McCarthy (1981) claim that vocabulary study has been neglected by linguists, applied linguists, and language teachers. This is the reality that grammar should be taught and that in due time learners would ‘acquire’ the vocabulary necessary to deal with particular communicative situations through their exposure to the target language.

During the 1980’s, however; interest in vocabulary teaching and learning grew, and during the 1990’s, a great deal of attention was given to vocabulary as an important factor in L2 learning for successful communication. Laufer (1986, p. 73) indicate that: “Until very recently vocabulary has suffered from step-child status in language acquisition research. The reasons for this plight might have been the linguist’s preference for closed systems describable by rules, the reaction of psycholinguists against the associative and the stimulus – response theories of learning and the interest of the methodologists in the beginning stages of language learning” (as cited in Ruben Chacon-Beltran, 2010, p. 1).

However, vocabulary is still not given the same importance as grammar. Next, we proceed to discuss the pedagogical importance of vocabulary in general and collocations in particular.

## **1. 8.2.Vocabulary Teaching and Collocations**

Vocabulary, in fact, is a wide area and a learner keeps on increasing his vocabulary throughout his life. It is not possible for an English language teacher to teach a large stock of vocabulary of English to the learners within a specific period of time. But, students can be taught some lexical collocations in such a time. In terms of practice of collocations, the tendency is to include more lexical collocations in intermediate and advanced textbooks than in beginning textbooks. Hill ( 2000, p. 48) believes that the intermediate level is the starting point for the teaching of collocations containing words that students have already learned as isolated words, whereas Higuera (2004) and Castillo Carballo (2009) state that explicit collocations should be taught from the beginning level.

In addition, textbooks concerning lexical collocations are not provided for use in EFL classes. Accordingly, Nesselhauf (2003) proves that it is necessary to teach collocational phrases explicitly, at least those that are different in the students' first language (L1) and L2. She adds that verb + noun and adjective + noun or noun + adjective collocational combinations are the most frequent types in English textbooks.

Furthermore, most of the vocabulary listed in English textbooks presented in the form of lists of words related only to the context in which they are used. Such lists do not include words frequently used in the real world such as words describing feelings or needed in shopping, and so on. However, even if they

include daily words, students may still not be able to use the words. The reason is that there is an important element missing from vocabulary course books which is the concept of collocation.

Collocation is not only missing in the vocabulary books, but also omitted in English classrooms. Rarely, teachers discuss how the students should learn lexical items. Thus, teachers have not paid much attention to how to build vocabulary and have not taught the notion of collocation. Unfortunately, they do not help student to develop ways of learning words effectively.

English language is full of strong collocational pairs and, therefore, the study of collocation is substantial in the study of vocabulary as McCarthy (1990, p.12) mentioned “collocation is an important organizing principle in the vocabulary of any language”. Therefore, vocabulary teaching with collocations is more important rather than grammar teaching for advanced learners; it is also essential to identify the problems that learners have in dealing with collocations.

### **1.8.3. Collocation as a Neglected Phenomenon**

Collocation, despite its pedagogical importance and significance, has been treated with considerable neglect. According to Bartsch (2004), some researchers basically Altenberg (1999, p. 127), argue that collocation is really a neglected phenomenon because of the diversity of structures subsumed under the term collocation. Also, the phenomenon ranges on the borderline between grammar and lexicon. Collocations have tended to be neglected in language teaching, regardless the fact that linguistic researchers and language teachers are continuously searching for a new approach that copes with the learners’ needs – this is a surprising fact because the development of such phenomenon is

purposely pedagogical, dating back to the work of Palmer (1933, p. ii) as a language teacher in Japan. Palmer propose that a collocation is a succession of two or more words that must be learned as an integral whole and not pieced together from its component parts; and that a mere selection of common collocations is found to contain thousands of examples “and therefore to exceed by far the popular estimate of the number of single words contained in an everyday vocabulary...” (Palmer, 1933 as cited in Bartsch, 2004, pp.26-27)

Palmer’s language teaching methodology involved urging his Japanese students to learn large numbers of collocations by heart as if they are single lexemes. More recently, Firthians and Sinclairians have kept reminding us that learning a language involves learning many multi-word expressions. Despite of the spread of corpus-based researches, collocations remain neglectful phenomenon in real practice in foreign languages classrooms. Thus, collocational knowledge is an interesting necessity for any learner of English.

### **1.9. Collocations as a Learning Problem**

Even among the best language learners, those completely native- like in their grammar and pragmatics, low frequency lexical items and restricted collocations will always present problems. Therefore, the task of developing native-like collocational knowledge in an L2 is a long and a difficult one because learners do not have adequate collocational mastery to produce acceptable collocations.

Gairns and Redman (1986, p. 37) see that “there are inevitably differences of opinion as to what represents an acceptable collocation in English”. Also, McCarthy (1990, p.15) disputes that “knowledge of collocation is based on years of experiences of masses of data ... statement about collocation, namely typical patterns of co-occurrence of words can never be absolute”. These opinions reveal that it is very difficult or even impossible to gain universal recognition of acceptability in collocation among adult native speakers of English.

Furthermore, there are no precise ‘rules’ of collocation. Teachers and learners are generally more successful when they deal with common collocational problems in isolation or as they arise.

### **1.10. The Importance of Collocations**

Collocations are word combinations which are made up of more than one word and are lexically or syntactically fixed to a certain degree (Nesselhauf 2003). These combinations, occurring together habitually, are so beneficial for the enrichment of learners’ language knowledge. Collocations play decisive role for foreign language learners. Collocations help learners speak and write the target language in a more natural and accurate way. Furthermore, learning collocations will help learners increase target language vocabulary and also help them understand and express sentences at a much faster rate. According to

Lewis (2000, p. 8), collocations are essential for learners to expand the proficiency of vocabulary in both spoken and written language.

There are two main reasons why collocations have been considered linguistically interesting. The first is that a word's typical collocates are thought to give us important information about its semantics. The collocational setting in which we encounter a word enables us, it has been argued, to choose between the various possible senses of an ambiguous word.. It has the chance to provide important clues to the clarification of ambiguity (Bartsch, 2004, p. 21).

Many linguists and researchers have stressed the importance of collocations for L2 learners learning. Brown (1974) suggests that learning collocations improves the learner's reading speed, oral proficiency and listening comprehension. Furthermore, we speak and write in chunks and learning collocations helps learners observe how native speakers in both spoken and written contexts use language. In addition, he has contended that this knowledge helps language learners use these expressions themselves.

Similarly, Syder and Pawley (1983) indicate the significance of collocations in language learning, especially in the production of native – as language structures. Laufer (1988) also stresses the importance of collocations in improving learning strategies, such as guessing (hearing a word, the learner will guess its collocates). Lewis (2000) states that learning chunks of words helps learners develop their communicative competencies better than learning

words in isolation. In order to acquire natural and native-like language, foreign language learners are advised to learn more collocations because the more they learn collocations, the more they master L2.

Collocations probably have great importance for many aspects of language competence, most importantly in speech production. To summarize the above mentioned importance of collocations, we cited Benson; Benson and Ilson (2009, p. XIII) who highlight the importance of this as follows:

“Learners of English as foreign or second language, like learners of any language, have traditionally devoted themselves to mastering words-their pronunciation, forms and meanings. However, if they wish to acquire active mastery of English, that is; if they wish to be able to express themselves fluently and accurately in speech and writing, they must learn to cope with the combination of words into phrases, sentences and texts.”

## **Conclusion**

The fact that students face problems concerning word groupings is perhaps due mainly to their ignorance of collocations. This problem has led to the widespread of what Lewis calls “mis-collocations” or wrong association of words. This may be further complicated by the problem of interference from Arabic as the mother tongue. Learners tend to translate L1 collocations into the L2; and therefore, their writing sounds unnatural. This chapter introduced the phenomenon with explanation and illustration. It summarized the phenomenon and introduced the main types and variations of collocations and their relationship to idioms and phrasal verbs to give an idea that collocational phenomenon is rich and worth the attention it attracts. The chapter shed light on the importance of collocations and the fact that they are neglected. It also presented collocations from learning and teaching perspective and the problems that learners and teachers may face when dealing with them.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **Assessing Collocational Competence**

## Introduction

Collocations have been recognized as one of the ways that differentiate native speakers' and second language learners. If a non-native speaker wants to help someone, she/he will say, "Can I help you?" whereas a native speaker will say, "Can I give you a hand?" (Salkauskiene, 2002). At the same time, it represents a huge problem to non-native speakers due to interference with their mother tongue. That is why Hill (1999) suggested the creation of a term 'collocational competence' and insisted that acquisition of lexis includes not just learning the total meaning of a word, but also its collocational span. Collocational competence was also addressed by some other researchers (Nattinger and DeCarrico, Lewis, Woolard as cited in Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992) who claim that it contributes to a better understanding of difficulties encountered by language learners. The importance of acquiring collocations in language teaching has been particularly emphasized in the last two decades. Research studies have also shown that collocational errors are the most frequent mistakes made by non-native speakers (James 1998). Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchy of collocational errors as perceived by Mc-Cretton and Rider (in James 1998).

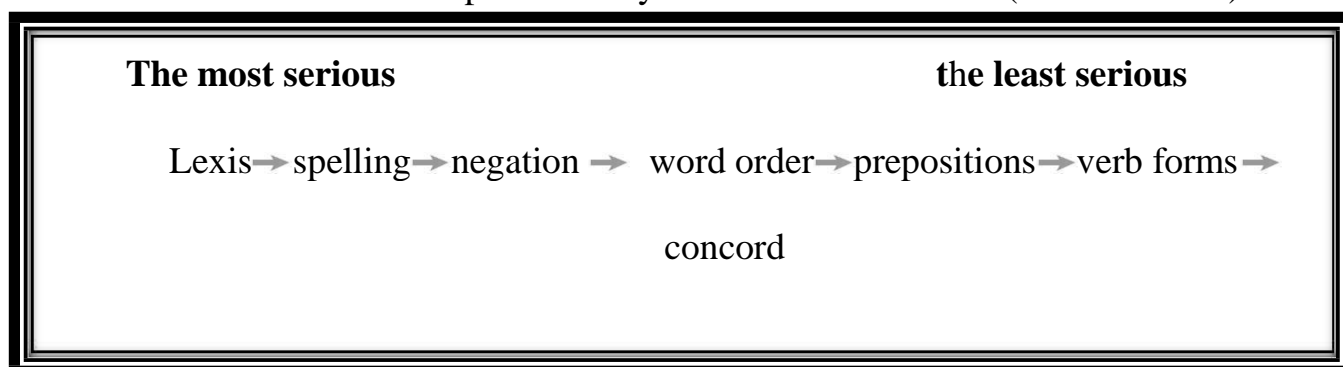


Figure 2.1. Hierarchy of mistakes according to McCretton and Rider (James 1998)

From the above figure, it can be seen that the lexical mistakes are the most serious ones. A speaker can be understood if he/she makes a grammatical mistake. However, if he/she makes a lexical mistake there could be misunderstanding and the same problem occurs with collocational mistakes. Therefore, in this chapter, we will test English collocation knowledge among 3<sup>rd</sup> year LMD students at Mohamed Boudiaf. The primary material consists of a collmatch test and then the researcher ends up the chapter with a summary of findings and conclusions about the whole research work.

## **2.1. Collocation Competence**

We are used to hear the concept of communicative and linguistic competence but “collocational competence” is usually an unfamiliar phrase. This concept is coined by Michael Lewis (2000, p. 49) who said: “We are familiar with the concept of communicative competence, but we need to add the concept of *collocational competence* to our thinking”. Collocational competence is “the ability to accurately combine chunks of language thus enabling production of fluent, accurate and stylistically appropriate speech” (Heikkila, 2005, p. 1). Some linguists (Alsakran, 2011; Brashi, 2006) categorize collocational competence into productive and receptive type. The categorization is informed by Nation’s (2001) ideas which group knowledge of vocabulary into productive and receptive knowledge. To define productive competence or knowledge of collocation, Alsakran (2011) says “Productive knowledge is the ability to use and have access to words (i.e. collocations) in speech and writing” (p. 11). Productive knowledge is then closely related to

speaking and writing, two language skills which are also productive. In other words, learners have the productive knowledge of collocation if they realize while speaking or writing that the item *homework* as a node or cluster, for example, should be paired with *do* (or its other inflections) as its collocates. Learners' mistakes in the choice of inflections and in spelling do not deny that they have the knowledge (see Brashi, 2006, p. 27). Receptive knowledge of collocation, on the other hand, is a language skill of EFL/ESL learners in which they just recognize collocation and its meaning only when they read it in a text or listen to it being spoken (Brashi, 2006). In other words, receptive knowledge just enables learners to recognize that certain collocates can be combined with a certain node or cluster, not with another cluster to form an acceptable collocation, when they are exposed to the use of the collocation. As such, receptive knowledge of collocation is passive since learners may not be able to apply the knowledge in their speaking and writing skills.

## **2.2. Methodology and Sampling**

### **2.2.1. Methodology**

In creating of the test format aimed at tapping receptive collocation knowledge, our intention was to create a test that was easy to administer, that contained a large number of items, and that would produce meaningful and analysable interval data. We decided to use a grid format. In the format henceforth called COLLMATCH (collocates matching), the test taker is

presented with a number of grids. An example of the COLLMATCH format can be seen in Figure 2.2 below.

	charges	patient	weight	hints	anchor	blood
drop						
lose						
shed						

Figure 2.2 Example of a COLLMATCH grid

The test taker is asked to indicate which of the objects felicitously may combine with. The number of possible combination is not known to the test taker and in theory all or none, and every possible number in-between, is possible. The same object may be combined with more than one of the three verbs. Therefore, it is not possible to arrive at the right answer by a process of elimination. Each and every of the alternatives above the grid must be tried for a potential match with all three of the words to the left of the grid. The instruction asks the informants to put a cross in the intersecting box of those words they think form combinations that exist in frequent use in English

### 2.2.2 Sampling

Polite et.al (2001, p. 234) defined sampling as: Sampling involves selecting a group of people, events, behaviors, or other elements with which to conduct a study. When elements are persons, they are known as subjects who

are selected from the delineated target population in a way that the individuals in the sample represent as nearly as possible.

The participants were fifty 3<sup>rd</sup> year students at the Department of Letters and English language at University of Mohamed Boudiaf. These participants were both male and female students. Their L1 background was Arabic.

### **2.2.3.Procedure**

Students were tested during their regular English class. The instructions were given in English and they had 90 minutes to do the test. The test was done anonymously. Data was collected and classified according to collocations types

### **2.3. Results and Discussion**

The answers collected from students' COLLMATCH have been counted and organized in tables in order to quantify the results which are presented below.

Total	
N	50
Mean	35,40
S.D.	16,92
Variance	286,28
Range	66,00
Min.	10,00
Max.	76,00

Table. 1.2. Descriptive statistics for collocational tests in percentages.

According to the results presented in Table 1, the total mean of correct answers in the test was 35.04, a considerably low score. Furthermore, the relatively low standard deviation (S.D.) (16.92) shows that the group is fairly homogeneous in their level of collocational knowledge. From these data we tentatively conclude that the overall collocational competence of the students was expected because of many reasons.

### **Research Question One**

Our research question one is:

1. What is their level of third year LMD students collocational competence?

According to the resulted derived from the analysis of data, it can be concluded that the level of competence of third year LMD students and their mastery of collocations is fairly low (35.04). This confirms the results reported by previous research which reported that the area of collocations represents a challenging area especially for L2 learners.

It can be explained by the interference of multiple factors such as:

- The interference of the mother tongue and collocations are literally translated from L1 into L2.
- Lack of awareness by the importance of producing correct collocations and dependence on independent free combinations of the lexical items by using the grammatical rules. This is exhibited

through learners' substituting items with their synonyms in a collocation.

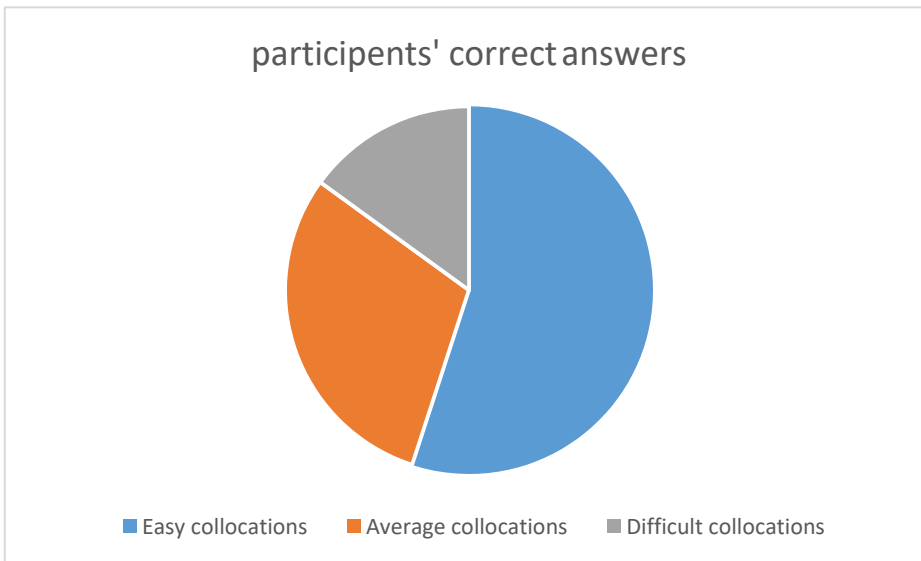


Figure 2.4 participants' correct answers

## Research Question Two

Building on research question one which confirmed that third year LMD students do face difficulties when using collocations, research question two will target knowing with what type of collocations learners face the most difficulties, or in other words, which type of collocations are the most challenging for learners. Hence came research question two:

What are the types of collocational difficulties the learners encounter?

As represented through Figure 2.2, more than the half of the participant who make (55%) do not face any kind of difficulties when they use the familiar collocation whereas with average difficulty collocations we can notice some difficulties because only (30%) answer correctly. Finally, with difficult

collocation (15%) we can confirm that there are real difficulties with this type of collocations and they represent a real challenge for learners. It is then confirmed that collocations which has been proved challenging with previous research constitute challenge to third year LMD learners at Mohamed Boudiaf University.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

### **Research Question Three**

Research question three targeted particularly knowing which type of collocation might be the most problematic and challenging for third year LMD learners. The question was:

Which types of collocation constitute the most challenging for learners?

Answering question three requires from us a thorough qualitative analysis of the data collected from learners and relate them to the types of collocations.

### **Collocation Types**

Benson and Ilson (1997) classified collocations into lexical and grammatical collocations:

Lexical collocations are composed of two or more words, i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, as shown below:

Grave offence	adjective + noun
Undergo an operation	verb + noun
Dust accumulates	noun + verb

Truly remarkable	adverb + adjective
Speak fluently	verb + adverb
Strongly agree	adverb + verb

**Grammatical collocations** are a combination of a content word and a function word in particular a preposition

An increase in	noun + preposition
sympathize with	verb + preposition
keen on	adjective + preposition
in reality	preposition + noun

The next step will be deciding whether LMD students at Msila University find it easier to deal with grammatical or lexical collocations. In order to do this, we have ordered learners performance by order from those collocations which had the highest score to those which had the poorest performance.

previous knowledge	48
previous idea	39
say a prayer	40
tell a joke	48
tell a story	45
tell a lie	38
speak a language	40
polite debate	25
heated debate	30
long debate	45
long speech	45

Table 2.2. Highest score collocations

As can be noticed from table 2.2 above, collocations which had the highest performance by learners were all lexical collocations and ranged between *adjective + noun* and in the first place and *verb + noun* in the second place. Therefore, we can conclude that lexical collocations of the above mentioned type constitute the less challenging types for third year LMD student. The second phenomenon that we can notice from data in table 2.2 above is that the units which constitute the collocations are familiar words for learners like *tell, joke, long, speech, lie, say, prayer, etc.*

From this observation, one can conclude that learners' correct answers and collocational competence is linked with their familiarity with the units which compose the collocations and not only with the type of collocation. This conclusion can further be confirmed if we check examples from table 3.2

prior knowledge	11
heated discussion	13
constant anxiety	6
repeatedly underscore	10
plausible hypothesis	5
improve attitude	8
readily obvious	10
painfully obvious	9
glaringly obvious	10
improve outlook	14
arrive at	16
careful about	13
warn of	2

Table 3.2. Lowest score collocations

The words *prior* and *plausible* might be unfamiliar to learners and that's perhaps why they received the lowest scores.

## Lexical Collocations

### Adjective + Noun Collocations

collocations (adjective + noun)	the number of participants
long debate	45
<i>aforementioned idea</i>	20
previous knowledge	48
previous idea	39

Table 5.3 Adjective + noun collmatch's result

Data from this test show good results in the participants' ability to recognize accurate adjective + noun collocations in English except with some unfamiliar collocations such as: *glaringly obvious* and *aforementioned idea*. Those collocations are unfamiliar to learners to students. In general, our results showed that *adjective + noun* are the easiest collocation type to use. This confirms our previous conclusion that the type of collocation alone is not decisive as regards the easiness with which learners perform and thus their collocational competence.

## Verb + Noun Collocations

collocations (verb + noun)	the number of participants
cause stress	23
cause anxiety	21
make a guess	25
support a thesis	21

Table 4.3 Verb + noun collmatch's results

Data from this test show better results in the participants' ability to recognize accurate *verb + noun* collocations in English. So, it can be concluded that this type of collocations ranked second at the level of difficulty which it constitutes for learners. We can notice that half of the participants succeeded at arriving to the right answers.

## Grammatical Collocations

### Verb + Preposition Collocations

collocation(verb + preposition)	the number of participant
arrive at	16
warn of	2
apologize for	5
look to	10

Table 3.3 Verb+ preposition collmatch's results

Data from this tests how an overall significant problem in producing acceptable *verb + preposition* collocations in English. The results suggest that the participants essentially lack collocational competence level when it comes to

this type in particular. This is perhaps due to the interference of their mother tongue or to the fact that preposition are few in English and that learners think that substituting a preposition with another does not constitute a serious issue. Therefore, much attention should be paid to this type in particular when designing activities for learners to boost their collocational competence.

## **Conclusion**

The present study examined collocational competence of EFL LMD students. The results suggest that English language students at the Department for English language and literature at the University of Mohamed Boudiaf face difficulties producing collocations. This might be due to several reasons the fact such as the one that teaching collocations is often neglected, or else because of their unawareness of the importance of collocations in the process of language learning. The results indicate poor students' collocational knowledge in general. Moreover, the results reveal that 3<sup>rd</sup> year students show more advanced collocational competence with lexical collocations in particular especially those composed of words familiar to them and frequently encountered. Lexical collocations proved to be fairly easier than grammatical collocations which are composed of a function word which is the preposition. According to all aforementioned suggestions, it can be stated that more effort should be made towards developing learners' collocational competence, taking into consideration their importance in the process of language acquisition. Since collocations represent a relatively new concept in linguistics, more awareness should be raised first regarding this issue and there should be a stronger emphasis on collocations in the process of curriculum development.

## **2.5. Pedagogical Implications**

Explicit instruction of collocations has to be involved in English teaching curricula where the focus is on raising learners' awareness of word combinations. In addition, the use of collocations dictionaries must be emphasized. Moreover, vocabulary would be better acquired if it is taught as a separate module, not through other modules because this is not sufficient. Although vocabulary is taught through other modules like oral expression and literature or civilization, the majority of students do not know collocations. Another proof is that grammar is always taught separately but students always face problems concerning the internalization of its rules. Collocations may have a great deal in foreign language teaching provided we draw learners' attention to them especially if vocabulary is taught as a separate module. As a result, learners would write and speak aiming at communicating effectively by using collocations. Eventually, they could be able to write proficiently and speak fluently so that their vocabulary would improve and their writing would sound more natural and native-like.

## **2.6. Suggestions for Further Research**

Researching English collocations is still in its infancy particularly in the Arab and Algerian context. Therefore, considerable attention is required from researchers and linguists to conduct more research to examine the nature of this linguistic phenomenon in depth.

Our research was conducted with third year LMD students at Msila University as a context. If we want the results to be further confirmed, we suggest that:

1. Future studies need to include a wide range of homogeneous participants from different universities and institutions in an attempt to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.
2. It would also be of interest to assess the learners' knowledge of collocations at varied language proficiency levels along with a range of learning stages to further investigate their difficulties with different types of English collocation.
3. Furthermore, more research is needed to investigate other types of lexical collocations. Further studies are needed to examine the learners' ability to use various types of grammatical collocations as well.
4. It would also be pertinent to investigate in-depth the influence of Learners' L1 (Arabic) on their production of collocation, major causes of learners' collocational errors, the learners' strategies in using collocations and the effect of explicit and implicit instructions on collocation learning.

## **General Conclusion**

The results of the present study proved what has long been reported by previous studies in the literature that collocation constitute one of the difficult and neglected area in L2 teaching and learning. Third year LMD learners at M'sila University were found to encounter difficulties with collocations and thus their collocational competence is judged to be low. This difficulty ranges from the most challenging types like grammatical collocations to less challenging lexical collocations and also collocations which hold a word unfamiliar to learners. This will ultimately lead to mis-collocations which are wrong combinations that students end up producing. These will make students look less native like and less competent, something which may seriously affect their overall linguistic competence.

Mis-collocations are widespread in EFL learners speaking and writing, and their words are associated inappropriately. Therefore, they need to use collocations in order to speak and write more proficiently. As indicated from the results of most previous empirical research, teaching English collocations to EFL learners would enhance their proficiency in writing and raise their collocational competence. As a consequence, diction may become an easier task when the learners already have ready "prefabricated chunks" in their mind. What must be done is only recalling these chunks or Multi Word Units from memory. Also, what the learners have to bear in mind is to consider these lexical chunks as a single word. Hence, teaching collocations would be beneficial for them. Teachers should help the learners develop their

communicative competence as well as their collocational competence so that they become fluent in English general. This could be achieved through an explicit teaching of collocations that is based mainly on building students' awareness of the most common collocates of a word.

The teacher is considered the responsible for helping the learners increasing their collocational knowledge through highlighting collocations in context by making students pay more attention to them. Feedback is also useful to overcome miscollocations. Exercises on collocations are very successful to provide practice of the most common collocations of a word. Collocations often have to be memorised; teachers can help learners focus on and remember collocations by exposing them to authentic texts, and by helping students to record collocations in their notebooks. Teachers have to rely on the available "authentic" materials of teaching collocations. They could adapt them according to learners' needs or they would better adopt their own materials on the basis of the needs of learners. Effective teachers would also collaborate with the learners along the teaching/ learning process. For instance by making them involved in choosing the materials that match suit them. Besides, teachers have to urge foreign language learners to use dictionaries especially those of collocations so as to enrich their vocabulary. In addition, collocation has to be included in the syllabus of TEFL especially at least in writing and speaking since it may have a direct influence on these two skills. Finally, it is better to teach vocabulary as a separate module so that learners will have an opportunity to be exposed to as much words as possible. In this case, they develop their

lexical competence including both individual words and Multi-Word Units. As a result, foreign language learners would become more able to decode the meaning of word-combinations like collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs...etc. which still constitute a major problem for them. Teaching collocations would help learners of foreign languages face the problem of mixing L1 and L2 collocations

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## Appendices

### Appendix I

**Directions:** Put check marks in the boxes that correspond to phrases that are common in English.

	...knowledge	...idea .....	experiment
prior	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
previous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
aforementioned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
preceding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	polite....	heated...	long...
debate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
speech	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
argument	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	cause...	constant...	repeatedly...	put great...on
stress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
emphasis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
underscore	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Formal..... plausible... support a... make a...

hypothesis				
guess				
conjecture				
thesis				


different... positive... ..... on life improve...

attitude				
outlook				
manner				

.....person .....smell .....situation .....time .....event .....result

mean						
unfriendly						
unpleasant						
difficult						
Bad-tempered						
unkind						
disgraceful						
bad						

	of	at	on	about	with	to	In	by	for
angry									
arrive									
careful									
no doubt									
warn									
surprised									
apologize									
depend									
speak									
Look									
furnish									
hear									
laugh									

	a prayer	a language	a joke	farewell	a story	lies
say						
tell						
speak						

**Thank you a lot for your cooperation**

## Appendix II

participants	marks
1	55
2	35
3	28
4	14
5	49
6	25
7	45
8	66
9	42
10	56
11	35
12	76
13	14
14	63
15	45
16	52
17	12
18	18
19	38
20	43
21	33
22	22
23	45
24	45
25	48
26	42
27	40
28	13
29	11
30	47
31	46

32	59
33	25
34	55
35	43
36	40
37	30
38	10
39	19
40	40
41	17
42	16
43	26
44	17
45	18
46	17
47	39
48	53
49	15
50	10

### Appendix III

correct collocations	number of correct answer
prior knowledge	11
previous knowledge	48
previous idea	39
aforementioned idea	20
preceding idea	19
polite debate	25
heated debate	30
long debate	45
long speech	45

heated argument	20
long argument	23
heated discussion	13
long discussion	25
cause stress	23
constant stress	18
repeatedly stress	18
put great stress on	20
put great emphasis on	18
cause anxiety	21
constant anxiety	6
repeatedly underscore	10
formal hypothesis	13
plausible hypothesis	5
support a hypothesis	15
make a guess	25
formal conjecture	11
plausible conjecture	20
formal thesis	15
support a thesis	21
appear obvious	24
readily obvious	10
painfully obvious	9
glaringly obvious	10
appear clear	14
painfully clear	14
different attitude	23
positive attitude	26
improve attitude	8
different outlook	19
positive outlook	16
outlook on life	23
improve outlook	14
different manner	18

angry at	25
angry with	20
arrive at	16
arrive in	25
careful of	19
careful about	13
careful with	17
no doubt of	17
no doubt about	23
warn of	2
warn about	18
surprised at	19
mean person	28
unfriendly person	27
unfriendly situation	22
unpleasant person	20
unpleasant smell	18
unpleasant situation	20
unpleasant event	15
unpleasant result	18
difficult person	24
difficult situation	28
difficult time	32
bad-tempered person	24
unkind person	22
disgraceful person	24
bad person	27
bad smell	26
bad situation	24
bad time	22
bad event	26
bad result	30
say a prayer	40
tell a joke	48

tell a story	45
tell a lie	38
speak a language	40

#### **Appendix IV**

previous knowledge	48
previous idea	39
say a prayer	40
tell a joke	48
tell a story	45
tell a lie	38
speak a language	40
polite debate	25
heated debate	30
long debate	45
long speech	45
heated argument	20
long argument	23
difficult person	24
difficult situation	28
difficult time	32
bad-tempered person	24
unkind person	22
disgraceful person	24
bad person	27
bad smell	26
bad situation	24
bad time	22
bad event	26
bad result	30
no doubt about	23
mean person	28

unfriendly person	27
unfriendly situation	22
long discussion	25
cause stress	23
cause anxiety	21
make a guess	25
plausible conjecture	20
different attitude	23
positive attitude	26
outlook on life	23
support a thesis	21
appear obvious	24
angry at	25
arrive in	25
aforementioned idea	20
preceding idea	19
unpleasant person	20
unpleasant smell	18
unpleasant situation	20
unpleasant event	15
unpleasant result	18
warn about	18
surprised at	19
constant stress	18
repeatedly stress	18
put great stress on	20
put great emphasis on	18
formal hypothesis	13
careful with	17
no doubt of	17
different outlook	19
positive outlook	16
careful of	19
different manner	18

angry with	20
appear clear	14
painfully clear	14
formal thesis	15
support a hypothesis	15
prior knowledge	11
heated discussion	13
constant anxiety	6
repeatedly underscore	10
plausible hypothesis	5
formal conjecture	11
improve attitude	8
readily obvious	10
painfully obvious	9
glaringly obvious	10
improve outlook	14
arrive at	16
careful about	13
warn of	2

## الملخص

ان المتلازمات اللفظية هي واحدة من اكثر المجالات اهمالا في دراسة المفردات و تعلم و تعليم الانجليزية كلغة ثانية بالرغم من اهميتها الاساسية في اتقان اللغة. هذا الاهمال هو السبب الاساسي لكتابة البحث الحالي. يهدف هذا البحث الى تقييم كفاءة الطلاب و زيادة الوعي بأهمية هذا البعد و تقديم رؤية شاملة لهذه الظاهرة المعجمية . يبدأ هذا البحث بمقدمة موجزة للموضوع حيث يعطي نظرة عامة على التصنيفات و التعريفات ذات صلة بالمتلازمات اللفظية. يتبع ذلك اساليب مختلفة لتعريفها و اهميتها في تعلم اللغة. يقدم الجزء الاخير تقييما لمعرفة مستوى كفاءة طلبة السنة الثالثة قسم إنجليزية النتائج المتحصل عليها خلال هذا العمل مكنتنا من تقديم اقتراحات من اجل مساعدة اساتذة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية في رفع وعي الطلبة و تعميق معرفتهم بالمتلازمات اللفظية . تم تصميم اختبارات قياس خاصة لقياس كفاءة الطلبة في التحكم في المتلازمات اللفظية حيث اظهرت النتائج ان مهارة الطلبة السنة الثالثة ليسانس بقسم الانجليزية بجامعة المسيلة في المتلازمة اللفظية تعتبر غير مرضية على العموم.

الكلمات المفتاحية : المتلازمات اللفظية ، دراسة المفردات ، تعلم و تعليم الانجليزية كلغة ثانية ، تقييم كفاءة الطلاب