

Investigating College Students' Competence in Grammatical Collocations

Rasha Ali S. Mohammed
Department of English Language
College of Languages, University of Baghdad, Iraq

Dr.Sabah Sleibi Mustafa
Department of English Language
College of Languages,
University of Baghdad, Iraq

Abstract

Collocations are arbitrarily restricted lexeme combination, whose importance in language has been increasingly recognized in recent years. The importance of collocations in foreign language learning, and the problems face the learners in using collocations have been underscored by numerous researchers. As a result, this study has devoted special attention to grammatical collocations. Collocations, in which a lexical and a more grammatical element (such as a preposition) co-occur, are called 'grammatical collocations'. Lexicographic evidence confirmed that collocations may appear in a large spectrum of configurations. Thus, the BBI collocation dictionary (Benson et al., 1986a) provides a very comprehensive list of grammatical collocations consists of eight patterns; the last pattern comprises nineteen English verb patterns. For the present study, only three patterns of grammatical collocations have been chosen to be probed (G1, G5, G8), these patterns are the collocation of NP, AP, or VP with PP. The reason behind selecting these three particular patterns is, actually, an attempt to find a sort of connection between these patterns of grammatical collocations, and the co-occurrence restrictions proposed by Chomsky in his standard theory. In "Aspects of the theory of syntax", Chomsky postulates that the syntactic structure imposes co-occurrence restrictions on the syntactic constituents. These co-occurrence restrictions consist of subcategorization rules and selectional restrictions. The present study, as a result, purports to be an investigation of the university students' grammatical collocation competence, a sample of sixty five college students at University of Baghdad, College of Languages, Department of English of the academic year 2011-2012, served as subjects. A test of 90-item of grammatical collocations was designed to assess the students' competence in both the receptive and productive collocational aspects. The data were examined and results showed that students encountered more difficulties on the production level than on the recognition level.

Keywords: grammatical collocations, subcategorization rules, selectional restrictions, collocational competence, collocational errors.

Introduction

Since the term "collocation" has been discussed in many linguistic areas such as semantics, phraseology, corpus linguistics and systematic linguistics, researchers have categorized collocations from different perspectives. Mackin (1975) classifies idioms and collocations into four categories based on idiomaticity from most to least fixed: pure idioms, figurative idioms, restricted collocations, and open collocations. Wood (1981) (cited in Nattinger & De Carrico, 1992), on the other hand, categorizes collocations a part of word combinations in addition to idioms, collocations and free word combinations on the basis of semantic and syntactic criteria in a continuum.

In fact, there are various categories of collocations which have been adopted by different linguists; however, most of them classify collocations into two major categories: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. Lexical collocations consist of co-occurrence of two lexical elements. For example adjective + noun (warmest regards) as in I send her my warmest regards. Grammatical collocations or colligations consist of co-occurrence of grammatical element (such as a preposition) or grammatical structure (such as to + infinitive) and lexical elements. For example (verb+ preposition), 'depend on' as in He depends on his writing for his income. (Verb + that-clause) as in she believed that she was wrong. The category of grammatical collocations is characterized by eight (8) basic types of collocations, and designated by G1, G2, etc., as shown in table (1) below:-

Table 1. Grammatical Collocations according to Benson et al (1986)

Type	Pattern	Example
G1	Noun + preposition	<i>She has fondness for chocolate. The government placed restrictions on the sale of alcohol.</i>
G2	Noun + to-infinitive	<i>He was a fool to do it. They felt a need to do it.</i>
G3	Noun + that-clause	<i>We reached an agreement that she would represent us in court.</i>
G4	Preposition + noun	<i>We met with accident at the airport, I saw him in agony.</i>
G5	Adjective+ preposition	<i>Jack is afraid of the dog. Sandra is good at needlework</i>
G6	Adjective + to-infinitive	<i>It was necessary to work. It's nice to be here.</i>
G7	Adjective + that-clause	<i>She was afraid that she would fail, it was imperative that I be here.</i>
G8	Verb+preposition	<i>We rely on his decision.</i>

This study adopts a framework based on the grammatical collocations, in particular, the patterns G1, G5, and G8. This framework consists of collocation of nouns, adjectives and verbs with prepositions as shown in table (2) below:-

Table 2. Framework of Grammatical Collocations Adopted in This Study

<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Lexical items collocate with Preposition</i>	<i>Example of Grammatical Collocations</i>
G1	N+ Prep	What is the reason for Hong Kong's air pollution?
G5	Adj+ Prep	I was disappointed with the gift.
G8	V+ Prep	Obviously you need to adapt to changing circumstances.

Transformational Generative Grammar Treatment of Grammatical Collocations

Chomsky's Mechanism of Co-occurrence Restrictions

Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) is a theory about syntax. Descriptions and explanations of phenomena of natural language are modeled in terms of syntactic structures. If such a syntactic theory has anything to say about collocations, it will be in syntactic terms. According to Transformational Generative Grammar, collocations live somewhere on the borderline between syntax and the lexicon, i.e. between free combinations (lexical items) on the one hand and completely fixed combinations (idioms) on the other hand. (Wouden, 1997: 25)

Chomsky in the *Aspect of the Theory of Syntax* (1965:191) points out that the expression *decide on the boat*, meaning 'choose to buy a boat' contains the combination *decide on* (in Chomsky's terminology: *close construction*), whereas *decide on a boat*, meaning "make a decision while on a boat" is a *free combination* (in Chomsky's terminology: *loose association*). The phrase *decide on the boat* is ambiguous between a fixed collocational reading, in which *decide on* functions as a semantic unit with the meaning 'choose', and a free combination reading, whereas *on the boat* functions as an adverbial phrase with a locational meaning. In the collocational reading the preposition *on* is obligatory, whereas it may be replaced by other locational prepositions in the free combination reading; such as *decide near the boat*, *decide in the boat*, etc. Chomsky also points out that the verbs in close construction are very different from verbs, which involve loose association. In the close constructions, the choice of the preposition is often constrained by the choice of verb (for example, "argue with X about Y"); therefore it is necessary to indicate that such lexical items as (*decide*, *argue*) take certain prepositions and not others. This information can be presented by assigning a contextual feature to the verb (for example, the contextual feature of *decide* will be [*on* NP], and the contextual feature of *argue* will be [*with* NP *about* NP]. (ibid.)

Therefore, Chomsky has been among the first to suggest the treatment of word combinations by semantics and syntax. Even though Chomsky does not examine collocations, he distinguishes between 'strict subcategorization rules', i.e. rules that "analyze a symbol in terms of its categorical context", and 'selectional restrictions', i.e. rules which "analyze a symbol in terms of syntactic features of the frames in which it appears" (Chomsky, 1965:95). These rules assist the generation of grammatical strings. The breaking of strict subcategorization rules will result in such ungrammatical strings as e.g.: '*you must abide my decision' '*John fond for Mary" and '*John emphasize on the positive aspects of discipline', while failure to observe the selectional restrictions will give sentence like 'Colorless green ideas sleep furiously' 'john argues with politics'. (ibid.:149)

Since, the aim of generative paradigm is to provide a competence model of language with important implications for the view of lexical collocations and grammatical collocations or colligations. Chomsky in his Standard Theory (ST) (1965) recognizes the necessity of incorporating a component into transformational grammar that could handle individual combinatorial properties of categories of lexical items. This has been achieved mainly by the introduction of *subcategorization rules* or *valence* and *selectional restrictions* to handle syntactic-semantic combinatorial features. (Bartsch,2004:39)

According to Mitchell (1975:10), "the concept of lexical collocation and grammatical collocation or colligation relate to a syntagmatic view of lexical and syntactic structure. TGG's subcategorization and selectional restrictions are apparently similarly motivated.", thus, Mitchell points out that the present subcategorization rules and selectional restrictions of TGG are benefited from the Firthian collocation. The subcategorization rules are also called the *C-selection* (Categorical Selection rules) and selectional restrictions are called *S-selection* (Semantic Selection rules) in more recent modification of TGG theory. (Chomsky, 1986)

These two types of restrictions govern the relationships between predicates and arguments. Thus, Collocational restrictions comprise information pertaining to requirements regarding how the argument structures of different elements are satisfied appropriately (Bartsch, 2004:41). Subcategorization rules specify what kind of complement a certain item subcategorizes. The subcategorization frame for *fond* simply specifies that the Prepositional Phrase (PP) complement subcategorized by *fond* takes the preposition *of* as its head constituent. Thus, a subcategorization rule for the predication use of *fond* looks like this:

fond: CATEGORICAL FEATURES: [+N]

SUBCATEGORIZATION FRAME: [N, ____ +PP]

Example: *she is*   *animals.*

For *angry*, a subcategorization rule looks like this:

angry: CATEGORICAL FEATURES:[+Adj]

SUBCATEGORIZATION FRAME: [Adj, ___+ PP]

Example: *She had been*  *the person who stole her purse.*

On the other hand, the subcategorization rules are complemented by rules modeling the selectional restrictions, dealing with the semantic properties of the complements (i.e., in its non-metaphoric usage), through covering the semantic feature structure of potentially combinable linguistic items, for instance verb *apologize to* usually selects a complement that is + HUMAN. (ibid.:42)

For *apologize to*: a selectional restriction looks like this:

Apologize to: SELECTIONAL RESTRICTION : [+ HUMAN]

Example: *John apologized to the head master.*

Whereas, *apologize for* usually selects a complement that is – HUMAN. For *apologize for*: a selectional restriction looks like this:

Apologize for: SELECTIONAL RESTRICTION: [- HUMAN]

Example: *The children apologize for being late.*

Collocational Competence

One of the debatable issues in linguistics is the term '*competence*', which has been used by different contexts to refer to different types of knowledge. However, it was originally set out by Noam Chomsky. Within the initiation of Chomsky's generative grammar as the dominant force in mainstream linguistic theory, there was a shift of focus towards syntax-centred linguistic theory. The prime aim of this theory is to develop a model of the abilities of native speakers of a language, which enable them to speak and understand their language fluently. (Erton, 2007:60)

Chomsky (1965) defines linguistic competence as; "the speaker-listener's intrinsic tacit knowledge of language". He also assumes:

Linguistic theory is primarily concerned with ideal speakers-listeners in completely homogeneous speech community who know their language perfectly and are unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention in applying their knowledge of the language in actual performance. (p.104)

Therefore, Chomsky presents the linguistic competence as an idealized understanding of the rules and construction of a given language. This includes the distinct lexical items used in the language, the combination of these lexical items, the creation of sentences and the interpretation

of these sentences. Once the speakers master this set of rules, they can use grammar to produce grammatical sentences that will be understood by other speakers of the same language (Radford, 1988:17). Later, Chomsky makes a neat distinction between linguistic competence (the speaker's or hearer's knowledge of language) and performance, (the actual use of language in concrete situations). (Chomsky, 1965:4)

Chomsky's linguistic theory also deals with how to use linguistic competence in a social context. Thus, the notion of *communicative or pragmatic competence* has early defined by Chomsky (1980: 224) as the "knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use (of the language), in conformity with various purposes". This concept has been seen in opposition to *linguistic (grammatical) competence* that in Chomskyan terms is "the knowledge of form and meaning." According to Widdowson (1989:135), "communicative competence is the ability to put language for communicative purposes". This category of competence considers language as a tool used for communication. Therefore communicative competence does not only aim to focus on the development of four language skills (writing, speaking reading, and listening) but also depends on the correlation between these skills. By doing so, the language users will be able to convey the right message.

Canale and Swain (1980:5) find that there is a reciprocity between the language rules and the rules of language use. For this reason, Canale and Swain consider the term "communicative competence" a mediator, which refers to the relationship between grammatical competence (the knowledge of the rules of language) and the communicative competence (the knowledge of the rules of language use).

Consequently, knowledge of a language is the result of many competences grouped together; hence, it is necessary to work on these competences to achieve the fluency in language. There are, actually, many types of competences: linguistic and communicative competences are familiar; but "collocational competence" is usually an unfamiliar concept coined by Lewis (2000: 49) who says: "We are familiar with the concept of communicative competence, but we need to add the concept of collocational competence to our thinking".

Without this competence, learners face many problems in their use of language. One of which is grammatical mistakes, as "learners tend to create longer utterances because they do not know the collocation which express precisely what they want to say" (Hill cited in Michael Lewis, 2000: 49). Therefore, it is important to focus an attention to the relationship between words that often appear together in order to help learners pass over collocational problems. Hill states, "Any analysis of learners' speech or writing shows a lack of collocational competence". Actually, learners' lack of collocational knowledge makes them not very competent in their language use. Some examples of wrongly used collocations are **good in*, **afraid from*, **amazement about*, **jealous from*. (ibid)

Thereby, the development of students' collocational competence would result in the improvement of linguistic and communicative competences. Writing as well as speaking would be more fluent, accurate and meaningful since the learners know the most common collocations that enable them to speak and write more efficiently. Hence, developing collocations competence means developing the linguistic and communicative competences, and this would facilitate the task of performing better in foreign language.

Grammatical Collocational Errors

Many researchers have attempted to analyze collocational errors made by learners in order to demonstrate their difficulties in collocation use. Analysis of collocational errors committed by the learners is an alternative approach that allows having a better understanding of the language learners' collocational competence. A common problem that learners have with collocation use, as observed by Lennon (1996) and others, is that they lack collocational knowledge.

According to Flowerdew and Mahlberg (2009:90), the most frequent category of collocational error is grammatical collocation or colligation. Learners' errors in this category were primarily with following prepositions. Nouns, verbs and adjectives can be followed by many different prepositions and there does not seem to be any apparent systematicity in their use. A preposition error can be a case of incorrect preposition selection (**They are good in swimming*), use of a preposition in a context where it is prohibited (**They came to inside*), or failure to use a preposition in a context where it is obligatory (** He is fond this book*). However, one can make the argument that preposition errors deserve a different and deeper kind of treatment, because they tend to be more semantically motivated. Therefore this would be an area worthy of study, in order to account for the difficulty learners have faced in such category of collocations.

Categories of Errors

A number of different categories for describing errors have been identified. Firstly, Corder (1973) cited in Mersin University Journal (2005:264) indicates that errors can be classified in terms of the differences between the learners' utterance and the reconstructed version. In this way, errors fall into four *linguistic* types in terms of *linguistic categories*: *omission of some required elements, addition of some unnecessary or incorrect elements, selection of an incorrect element, substitution of elements, and disordering of elements.*

Nevertheless, Corder himself adds that this classification is not enough to describe errors. That is why, Corder (1973) cited in Allen & Corder (1974: 130) identifies *psychological* categories of errors, which explain the sources of errors such as *:(1) Language Transfer (2) Overgeneralization or analogy (3) Methods or Materials used in the Learning.*

Richards (1974) cited in Richard (1973:172) categorizes four major types or causes of errors *(1) language transfer (interlingual and intralingual interference) (2) ignorance of rules restrictions (3) incomplete application of rules (4) false concepts hypothesized.* Later, Richards adds other sources of errors, namely: *(1) overgeneralization (2) performance errors (3) markers of transitional competence (4) strategies of communication and assimilation and (5) teacher-induced errors.* Selinker (1972) cited in Richard (1974:35) classifies errors into five categories:*(1) language transfer (2) transfer of training,(3)strategies of second learning, (4) strategies of second language communication, (5) overgeneralization of target language's linguistic material.*

Richard and Simpson (1974:3) advocate the study of learners' approximate systems and identify six factors characterizing second language learner systems, namely: *(1) language transfer (2) sociolinguistic situation, (3) modality, (4) age, (5) successions of approximative systems (6) universal hierarchy of difficulty.* Tylor (in Ellis,1994:29) identifies four different categories of error on the basis of a broader view: *(1) psychological categories, the difficulty of*

production(2) *sociolinguistic categories*, the difficulty in adjusting language in accordance with social contexts,(3) *epistemic categories*, learners lack of knowledge, and (4) *discourse categories*, problems with organization of information into a coherent text.

Concerning collocational errors, many recent experimental studies, (Channell, 1981; Zughoul,1991; Bahas, 1993; Bahns & Eldaws, 1995; Liu, 1999; Flowerdew & Mahlberg,2009) have pointed out several factors that may influence learners' competence in making correct collocations. The researchers discover that the causes of collocational errors are related to many sources such as; (1)*language transfer (interlingual interference) (intralingual interference)* (2) *analogy* (3) *overgeneralization(fossilization)* (4)*ignorance of rule restrictions* (5) *paraphrase* (6)*shortage of collocational knowledge* (7) *context of learning*(8) *incomplete application of rules*

Table 3. Major Factors Behind Errors

<i>Learning Strategies</i>	<i>Major Factors Behind Errors</i>	<i>Categorizations of Factors Behind Errors</i>
<i>Cognitive Strategies</i>	<i>(Transfer)</i> <i>Interlingual Transfer</i>	<i>-Interference</i>
	<i>Intralingual Transfer</i>	<i>-Overgeneralization</i> <i>- Ignorance of rule restrictions</i> <i>- Incomplete application of rules</i>
	<i>Context of learning</i>	<i>- False concept hypothesized</i>
<i>Communication Strategy</i>	<i>Paraphrase</i>	<i>- Avoidance</i> <i>-Approximation</i> <i>-Use of synonymy</i>

Transfer

Transfer is a general term describing the carryover of previous knowledge to subsequent learning. George (1971) and Lance (1969) find that one-third of the deviant sentences from learners of target language could be attributed to language transfer. Transfer can be divided into two types: Positive transfer, and Negative transfer that is responsible for the *intralingual* and *Interlingual*.

Interlingual Transfer (Interference)

Interlingual transfer is a significant source of error for all learners. The beginning stages of learning second language are especially vulnerable to interlingual transfer or interference from the native language. In these early stages, before the system of the second language is familiar, the native language is the only previous linguistic system upon which the learner can draw. The cognitive strategy of interlingual transfer or interference is evident example of errors committed by students on both recognition and production tasks. In the recognition, evidence of this

strategy is provided by items 5,8. In these items, it is quite possible that interlingual transfer is the driving force behind the errors, and such errors have been fossilized and become part of learners' collocational competence.

5. **He was very good in swimming.* Q1

In response to this item, forty one (41) subjects chose the wrong preposition (*in*) instead of (*at*), since the grammatical collocation (**good in*) is closer to the possible use in Arabic.

8. **I gain admission from one of the best universities in the USA.* Q1

Likewise, in item (8), forty six (46) subjects chose the incorrect preposition (*from*) instead of the preposition (*to*), which leads to the miscollocation (**admission from*).

Intralingual Transfer (Overgeneralization)

Overgeneralization is a crucially important and pervading strategy in human learning. To generalize means to infer a law, rule or conclusion usually from the observation of particular instances (Brown,2007:103). Accordingly, the term overgeneralization refers to the reliance on a prior learning to facilitate new learning. Evidence of such a strategy in the present study, is errors committed by students by overgeneralizing the use of preposition (*on*) in item (3) without noticing that AP (dependent) collocate with the preposition (*on*) when it is affirmative; while it collocates with the preposition (*of*) when it has the meaning of negation, which leads to a miscollocationas in follows:

3. **Mary is entirely independent on her parents.* Q3

Item (29) is also another example of error can be traced back to the overgeneralization of a syntactic rule in the target language, in this item (47) subjects chose the preposition (*of*) depending on overgeneralizing the rule that AP (*fond*) collocates with the preposition (*of*), such as "*Mary is fond of Jack*", without taking into account that the NP (*fondness*), unlike its Adjective, collocates with other preposition which is (*for*).

29. **I have always had fondness of her.* Q1

Ignorance of Rule Restrictions

This type of learning strategy is identified by Richards (1974:175) which results from learners' failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures, i.e., the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply. Some rule restriction errors may be accounted for in terms of *analogy*; other instances may result from the rote learning of rules. Accordingly, failures to observe rules restrictions may lead to analogy, i.e., the learner rationalizing a deviant usage from his previous experience of English which based on ignoring rule restrictions. (ibid.)

Evidence of such a strategy in the present study, an extensive number of errors which reveals the students' unawareness of the rules restricted the grammatical collocations. Examples of such errors item (6):

6. **They have got to abide in the rules.* Q1

In this item(6),thirty (30) subjects use the incorrect preposition (in) as a result of their ignorance of the syntactic restriction which impose the rule that the VP (*abide*) should co-occur with the preposition (*by*) Accordingly, any change in this preposition will generate deviant structure.

Incomplete Application of Rules

Under this category, it can be noticed that the occurrence of structures whose deviancy represents the degree of development of the rules required to produce acceptable structures.(Richards ,1974:177) as for the present study, the data reveal numerous examples of errors made by students in grammatical collocations as a result of incomplete application of rules. The grammatical collocations are produced according to the rules of co-occurrence restrictions, either the syntactic or semantic rules; any case of incomplete application of these rules would constitute deviant and unacceptable structures. The following errors are examples of iIncomplete application of rules:-

9. **The airports all over the world **divide to** local and international.*Q4

17. **They have been **deprived from** all their civil rights according to the court's resolution.*Q4

Context of Learning (False Concepts Hypothesized)

This strategy is another major factor behind error; it overlaps both types of transfer. "Context" refers to the classroom with its teacher and its materials, which negatively influence the learning of the target language. In a classroom context the teacher or the textbook can lead the learner to make faulty hypotheses about the language, what Richards (1974) called "*false concepts*" and what Stenson (1974) termed *induced errors*.

Accordingly, the grammatical collocations have almost been neglected within the context of learning. Brown (2007:266) indicates that two vocabulary items presented contiguously – for example, *point at* and *point out* – might in later recall be confused simply because of the contiguity of presentation. That is why the data revealed many examples of random choice of prepositions that confirms the shortage competence or knowledge of grammatical collocations and the false concepts about this category of collocations.

21. **It is not polite to **allude on** someone's disability.*Q1

25. **People should be equal; no one has **advantages on** another.*Q1

28. * *This figure could reflect their **dissatisfaction about** the percentage of achievement.*Q1

Communication Categories of Errors

The speculative early research of the 1970s (Varadi, 1973 and others) led to a great deal of recent attention to communication strategies (Bialystok, 1990; McDonough, 1999; Chomat, 2005). Faerch and Kasper (1983:36) define communication strategies as" potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual present itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal".

Paraphrase

Avoidance Strategy

A voidance is a common communication strategy. The phenomenon of avoidance behaviors was first brought to light by Schachter (1974), who points out the importance of examining not only the target language forms that were actually produced by the learners of a foreign language, but also the target language forms they seem to avoid using consistently. Among the various types of avoidance strategies, the first type is syntactic avoidance, where the students can make use of paraphrase relation in order avoid difficult structures i.e., rewording the message (Schachter, 1974:361). The second type is lexical avoidance, which is manifested when there is a lack of vocabulary knowledge; accordingly, the students choose a synonym, or a superordinate term or paraphrasing. Topic voidance is identified by students avoiding the talk about the concepts. (ibid.)

As for the present study, the semantic avoidance seems to be relevant to the errors found in the data.

1. Semantic avoidance of grammatical collocations is a voidance strategy in translation; whereby the subjects under study avoid the lexical item entirely for not being able to come up with the lexical items required to be produce the grammatical collocations i.e., the students resort to another lexical items instead of the required form of grammatical collocations while still conveying the same meaning through producing the sentence. Evidence of this strategy in the present study is a number of examples in which students avoid using the grammatical collocations due to their unawareness of the prepositions which collocate with the NP, VP or AP as in the items as follows:

11. ليس الكتاب مقتصرًا على بحث الامور السياسية.

11. *The book is not **restricted to** discuss the political issues.*

22. هذا المعدن مقاوم للتآكل والصدأ.

22. *This metal is **resistant to** corrosion and rust.*

Approximation Strategy

According to Liu (1999:147), “approximation strategy” is a type of paraphrase which is used to make up a new word for the purpose of communicating the desired lexical item; this strategy motivated by a substitute option based on certain semantic properties, or some kind of ‘semantic approximation’. Thus, errors which are caused by approximation either share similar syntactic features with the correct items or have semantic affinity with the target items. The learners resort to the strategy of approximation as the correct structure in the target language has not been firmly formed. They also resort to the strategy of approximation when they are not certain about the correct structure. In short, learners tend to approximate to ease their linguistic burden. Evidence of this strategy in the data is as follows:-

4- ان للاشجار والزهور فوائد كبيرة فهي تقلل من نسبة التلوث البيئي.

4 -The trees and flowers have great benefits since they **minimize** the rate of environmental pollution.

9 - تنقسم المطارات في دول العالم إلى محلية ودولية.

9. The airports all over the world **bisect** local and international.

Use of Synonymy

Blum and Levenston (1987:65) observe that the recourse to semantic affinity is a common lexical simplification strategy. Learners may not be fully aware of the complete collocational distribution of synonymous words in certain linguistic contexts. That is why; they use near-synonymous words to substitute each other without considering the collocability and contextual appropriateness of the substituting word with the neighboring items. Accordingly, the subjects of this study resort to the use of synonymy to avoid using grammatical collocations. This strategy can be seen as a compensatory strategy motivated by an alternative choice based on some kind of similarity in meaning but different words. It seems that the subjects do not to have learned the co-occurrence restrictions of subcategorization rules that is why they have ignored the use of grammatical collocations replacing them by one word.

16- ينبغي على القادة السياسيين أن يكونوا على دراية بمطالب الشعب.

16. The political leaders should **know** the demands of people

3- يتألف فريق كرة القدم من أحد عشر لاعباً.

3. Football team **contains** eleven players.

Mean

The mean is the most commonly used measure of central tendency. It is computed by dividing the sum of the separate scores by the total number of the testees. For this purpose the following formula is used:

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

M= mean

Σ = the sum of scores.

N= number of testees.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Mean for the Variable of Recognition for each Group

Recognition	N	*G1		*G2		G1 &G2	
	65	Mean	14.60	Mean	24.10	Total Means	18.98

*G1= second stage, *G2= fourth stage

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of the Mean for the Variable of Production for each Group

Production	N	G1		G2		G1&G2	
	65	Mean	7.34	Mean	19.85	Total Mean	13.12

Since the value of M Rec. is greater than that of M Prod., it is clear that student's competence at the Rec. level is better than that at the Prod. level. The values according to both tasks of (Rec. and Prod.) are as follows:

$$18.98 \text{ Rec.} > 13.12 \text{ Prod.}$$

Standard Deviation

The standard deviation refers to the extent to which the scores deviate from the mean. It illustrates how the scores spread out on each side of the mean. It is computed by the following formula:

$$\text{Standard Deviation (S.d.)} = \frac{\sqrt{\sum d^2}}{N}$$

d^2 = the square value of the deviation of each score from the mean.

N= number of testees.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of the Standard Deviation for the Variable of Recognition for each Group

Recognition	N	G1		G2		G1 &G2	
	65	S.d.	3.31	S.d.	7.77	Total S.d.	7.48

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Standard Deviation for the Variable of Production for each Group

Production	N	G1		G2		G1 &G2	
	65	S.d.	4.15	S.d.	7.55	Total S.d.	8.63

The value of S.d. Rec. is less than that of S.d. Prod., it is clear that student's competence at the Rec. level is better than that at the Prod. level, since the less the value of S.d. , the better is the value. The values according to both tasks of (Rec. and Prod.) are as follows:

$$7.48 \text{ Rec.} < 8.63 \text{ Prod.}$$

Reliability

A test is not valid if the scores are not reliable. A reliable test is defined as “one that procedures essentially the same results consistently on different occasions when the conditions of the test remain the same.” (Madsen, 1983:179)

The method adopted to estimate the reliability of the data of this study is Cronbach's Alpha formula:

$$\alpha = \frac{n}{n-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum Vi}{V_{test}} \right)$$

- n = number of questions
- Σ= the sum of scores.
- Vi = variance of scores on each question
- Vtest = total variance of overall scores on the entire test

The reliability of both tasks was found out to be: 0. 64 for the Rec., 0.78 for the Prod., and 0.86 for the total which indicates that the test is reliable.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of the Reliability for the Test

Cronbach' Alpha	Rec.	Value	0. 64
		N of Tasks	2(a)
	Prod.	Value	0.78
		N of Tasks	2(b)
	Rec. & Prod.	Value	0.86
	Total	N of Tasks	4

Correlation

For knowing whether there is a correlation of a significant difference between the Rec, and Prod. levels for each group, Spearman-Brown Coefficient is used for this purpose. The results prove a highly positive correlation between the Rec. and Prod. levels between the two groups and within each group. The correlation is illustrated in the following table:

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of the Correlation for the Test

G1	Correlation between (R&P) for second stage = 0.78**
G2	Correlation between (R&P) for fourth stage = 0.60**
G1 & G2	Correlation between (R&P) for total = 0.72**

t-Test

The t-test is used to find out whether to validate or refute the hypotheses (2,3) of the test mentioned above. The formula below satisfies the objectives of the present test:

$$t = \frac{X - M}{S.d./n}$$

To know whether there is statistically significant difference between the Rec. and Prod. levels for each group (G1,G2) , the t-test formula is used for the two dependent samples, the results are as follows:-

1- Second Stage (G1): the statistical analysis for (G1) proves that the computed t-test value equals (8.09) is more than the tabulated t-test value which equals (2.63) at the significant level (0.01), with taking into consideration that the Mean value of the Rec. level is (14.60); while the Mean value of the Prod. level is (7.34) that means, there are statistically significant differences between the Rec. and Prod. levels. Accordingly the student's competence of G1 at the Rec. level is better than that of the Prod. level.

2- Fourth Stage (G2): the statistical analysis for (G2) proves that the computed t-test value equals (2.15) is more than the tabulated t-test value which equals (2.01) at the significant level (0.05), with taking into consideration that the Mean value of the Rec. level is (24.10); while the Mean value of the Prod. level is (19.85) that means, there are statistically significant differences between the Rec. and Prod. levels. Accordingly the student's competence of G2 at the Rec. level is better than that of the Prod. level.

3-G1& G2: the statistical analysis for (G1, G2) proves that the computed t-test value equals (4.14) is more than the tabulated t-test value which equals (2.59) at the significant level (0.01), with taking into consideration that the Mean value of the Rec. level is (18.98); while the Mean value of the Prod. level is (13.12) that means, there are statistically significant differences between the Rec. and Prod. levels. Accordingly the student's competence of G1 and G2 at the Rec. level is better than that of the Prod. level, and the competence of fourth stage's students

(G2) is better than the competence of second stage's students (G1) in using grammatical collocations at the Rec. and Prod. levels.

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics of t-test for the Test

		Sample size	Mean	St.d.	t-test	t-tab 0.05 0.01	p-value	Sig
	R	35	14.60	3.31	8.09	1.99	0.000	HS
Second Stage G1	P	35	7.34	4.15		2.63		
	R	30	24.10	7.77	2.15	2.01	0.036	S
Fourth Stage G2	P	30	19.85	7.55		2.68		
	R	65	18.98	7.48	4.14	1.97	0.0001	HS
G1&G2	P	65	13.12	8.63		2.59		

S: Significant at level $P < 0.05$.

HS: Highly Significant at level $P < 0.01$.

Recognition Level vs. Production Level.

To know whether there are statistically significant differences between G1 and G2 in each level (Rec.& Prod.), the statistical analysis of the test results verify the following as shown in the table :-

Table 11. Comparison between Groups in each Variable

		Sample size	Mean	Std	t-test	t-tab 0.05 0.01	p-value	Sig
R	Second Stage	35	14.60	3.31	6.58	2.00	0.000	HS
	Forth Stage	30	24.10	7.77		2.66		
P	Second Stage	35	7.34	4.15	8.43	2.00	0.000	HS
	Forth Stage	30	19.85	7.55		2.66		
Total	Second Stage	35	21.94	5.44	8.75	2.00	0.000	HS
	Forth Stage	30	43.95	13.69		2.66		

S: Significant at level $P < 0.05$.

HS: Highly Significant at level $P < 0.01$.

1-Rec. level: since the computed t-test value of the Rec. level equals (6.58), and this value is more than the tabulated t-test value, which equals (2.66) at the significant level (0.01), that refers to existence of statistically significant differences between second stage's students (G1) and fourth stage's students (G2). Noticing that the Mean value of G2 equals (24.10) which is also more than the Mean value of G1 which equals ((14.60. Accordingly, the fourth stage students' competence at the Rec. level is better than second stage students' competence.

2- Prod. Level: since the computed t-test value of the Prod. level equals (8.43), and this value is more than the tabulated t-test value, which equals (2.66) at the significant level (0.01), that refers to existence of statistically significant differences between second stage's students (G1) and fourth stage's students (G2). Noticing that the Mean value of G2 equals (19.85) which is also more than the Mean value of G1 which equals (7.34). Accordingly, the fourth stage students' competence at the Prod. level is better than second stage students' competence.

3- Rec. & Prod. Levels: since the computed t-test value of the Prod. & Rec. levels equals (8.75), and this value is more than the tabulated t-test value, which equals (2.66) at the significant level (0.01), that refers to existence of statistically significant differences between second stage's students (G1) and fourth stage's students (G2). Noticing that the Mean value of G2 equals (43.95) which is also more than the Mean value of G1 which equals (21.94). Accordingly, the fourth stage students' competence at the Rec. & Prod. levels is better than second stage students' competence.

However, the findings reveal that students' collocation knowledge is quite insufficient, and the overall results show that students' competence in collocations is far from satisfactory, since the students don't demonstrate sufficient collocational knowledge.

Subjects' Competence in Three Patterns of Grammatical Collocations (VP, NP and AP +Preposition)

For knowing whether there are any significant differences between G1 and G2 in terms of the three patterns of grammatical collocations. The z-test formula is used to testify the error percentages. The results prove the following:

1-Errors in Grammatical Collocational Pattern (VP+ Prep): the computed z-test equals (6.65) is more than the tabulated z-test which equals (2.57) at the significant level (0.01), that means there are statistically significant differences between G1 and G2 in errors committed in VP pattern. Given that the percentage of error committed by G1 in this pattern is (%75.64), comparing with the percentage of error committed by G2 is (%61.92). Accordingly, G2 is better than G1 in this pattern of grammatical collocations.

2-Errors in The Grammatical Collocational Pattern (NP+ Prep): the computed z-test equals (7.82) is more than the tabulated z-test which equals (2.57) at the significant level (0.01), that means there are statistically significant differences between G1 and G2 in errors committed in NP pattern. Given that the percentage of error committed by G1 in this pattern is (73.43%), comparing with the percentage of error committed by G2 is (57.67%). Accordingly, G2 is better than G1 in this pattern of grammatical collocations.

3-Errors in Grammatical Collocational Pattern (AP+ Prep): the computed z-test equals (0.83) is less than the tabulated z-test which equals (1.96) at the significant level (0.05), that means there are no statistically significant differences between G1 and G2 in errors committed in AP pattern. Given that the percentage of error committed by G1 in this pattern is equal and approximate. The percentage of errors committed by G1 is (%77.24), and the percentage of error committed by G2 is (%75.44). Accordingly, the errors percentages of G1 and G2 are approximates; even though G2 is also better than G1 in this pattern of grammatical collocations.

The conclusions that are drawn from the statistical findings prove that the higher error percentages of G1 and G2 in the three patterns of grammatical collocations are AP, VP, and then NP respectively. That means the subjects' competence in NP is better than VP and AP.

The tables below illustrate the error percentages in the three patterns.

Table 12. *Percentage Errors of the Patterns of Grammatical Collocations*

Subjects	Patterns	Error Percentage
G1	NP	73.43
	VP	75.64
	AP	77.24
G2	NP	57.67
	VP	61.92
	AP	75.44
G1&G2	NP	66.15
	VP	69.31
	AP	76.41

Table 13. *Descriptive Statistics of z-test for the Patterns of Grammatical Collocations*

		Sample size	% error	z-test	z-tab 0.05 0.01	Sig
VP	Second Stage	35	75.64	6.65		HS
	Fourth Stage	30	61.92			
NP	Second Stage	35	73.43	7.82	1.96 2.57	HS
	Fourth Stage	30	57.67			
AP	Second Stage	35	77.24	0.83		NS
	Fourth Stage	30	75.44			

HS: Highly Significant at level $P < 0.01$.

NS: Non Significant at level $P > 0.05$.

Conclusions

L2 learners of English still have problems with English grammatical collocations; the students' overall proficiency in this linguistic area was found as inadequate. The study aims at probing any discrepancy in the learners' competence on the set tasks according to their academic levels. It also investigates the communicative strategies employed by the learners when attempting translation from the native language into the target language. On the whole, the study has subscribed to the role of native language in the foreign language learning, concluding that the majority of errors made by the two groups are the result of the learners' mother tongue interference as the major creative cognitive source of errors. However, the transfer of the target language itself as overgeneralization and ignorance of rule restrictions appeared as the possible twofold cause of intralingual errors. This reflects the learners' incompetence in recognizing the syntactic and semantic co-occurrence restrictions on the correct use of English grammatical collocations.

The aim of this study is to identify students' competence to collocate English grammatical collocations correctly. Motivated by this, the study has reflected L2 learners' poor competence in producing and recognizing the patterns of this category of collocations. That is to say, without thinking about grammatical rule of collocational restrictions, the subjects failed to recognize or produce the correct prepositions that collocate with lexical items to constitute well-formed grammatical collocations.

The present study seeks to investigate the productive and receptive knowledge of grammatical collocation of learners of English. The results of the data validate and refute some of the hypotheses of the study. It was found that the subjects' receptive collocational knowledge was broader than their productive collocational knowledge. Moreover, participants did not seem to have difficulty with adjective-preposition collocations; however, verb-preposition and noun-preposition collocations were very challenging and much more difficult. In summary, the results showed that collocations present a source of difficulty for English language learners. Therefore, collocations need more attention from L2 curriculum designers and teachers.

About the authors:

Rasha Ali S. Mohammed is a M.A. candidate at Department of English, College of Languages, University of Baghdad. She is also a translator at Board of Supreme Audit (BSA), Baghdad-Iraq. Her main areas of interest are translation and oral interpretation, syntax, language testing and research in applied linguistics.

Prof. Dr. Sabah Sleibi Mustafa is a full professor of Linguistics and translation. He is the Head of Department of English at College of Languages, University of Baghdad-Iraq. His main areas of interest are translation, syntax, morphology, and language teaching. He is also an editor of the advisory board of the Arab World English Journal.

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Appendix A. Tasks of grammatical collocations

PART ONE

TASK I

Complete each sentence with a suitable preposition that follows the verb, adjective or noun.

1. *They are interested ----- collecting stamps.*

A. *from* B. *of* C. *in* D. *with*

2. *Can you dispose ----- the rubbish?*

A. *for* B. *to* C. *by* D. *of*

3. *We are able to cope ----- all of these difficulties.*

A. *to* B. *from* C. *with* D. *over*

4. *I don't think she is envious ----- your success.*

A. *of* B. *for* C. *to* D. *from*

5. *He was very good ----- swimming.*

A. *in* B. *at* C. *of* D. *on*

6. *They have got to abide ----- the rules.*

A. *to* B. *in* C. *by* D. *for*

7. *We stayed at home because Ann wasn't very keen ----- going out in the rain.*

A. *for* B. *to* C. *on* D. *of*

8. *I gain admission ----- one of the best universities in the USA.*

A. *from* B. *at* C. *in* D. *to*

9. *BBC stands ----- British Broadcasting Corporation.*

A. *by* B. *of* C. *for* D. *off*

10. *The flat consists ----- four rooms.*

A. *from* B. *of* C. *for* D. *on*

11. *There has been an increase ----- road accidents recently.*

A. *in* B. *of* C. *over* D. *at*

12. *I'm preparing ----- my exam.*

A. *to* B. *of* C. *on* D. *for*

13. *They make generous contribution ----- charity.*

A. *in* B. *to* C. *from* D. *with*

14. *Who was responsible ----- this noise last night?*

A. *of* B. *to* C. *for* D. *about*

15. *There is a great insistence ----- changing the current system.*

A. *on* B. *for* C. *by* D. *of*

16. *If children were inferior ----- other children, their confidence would be declined.*

A. *for* B. *with* C. *to* D. *from*

17. *I objected ----- being kept waiting.*

A. *to* B. *over* C. *on* D. *by*

18. *We rejoiced ----- the good news.*

A. *of* B. *about* C. *from* D. *at*

19. *The Italian city of Florence is famous ----- its art treasures.*

A. *for* B. *with* C. *in* D. *of*

20. *It is stupid ----- her to go out without a coat.*

A. *from* B. *of* C. *to* D. *for*

21. *It is not polite to allude ----- someone's disability.*

A. *by* B. *at* C. *on* D. *to*

22. *The train was late but no one knew the reason ----- the delay.*

A. *of* B. *about* C. *in* D. *for*

23. *There has been too much concentration ----- women's issues.*

A. *with* B. *to* C. *on* D. *of*

24. *Let's hope they will refrain ----- hostile action.*

A. *by* B. *of* C. *in* D. *from*

25. *People should be equal; no one has advantages ----- another.*

A. on B. over C. of D. to

26. *His amazement ----- the news was immense.*

A. on B. about C. in D. at

27. *Linda is married ----- an American citizen.*

A. of B. to C. with D. from

28. *This figure could reflect their dissatisfaction ----- the percentage of achievement.*

A. of B. about C. in D. with

29. *I have always had fondness ----- her.*

A. for B. by C. about D. of

30. *The situation was worsened by lack ----- communication.*

A. for B. in C. of D. with

TASK II

Please choose the correct prepositions in the two blanks.

1. *He did apologize ----- the headmaster ----- being late.*

A. with B. for C. about D. to

2. *John always argues ----- Bill ----- politics.*

A. about B. in C. of D. with

3. *Do you agree ----- me ----- the course of action?*

A. on B. with C. to D. in

4. *We all pray ----- God ----- peace and stability.*

A. for B. about C. to D. in

5. *They were angry ----- their neighbour ----- the noisy party.*

A. on B. about C. for D. at

6. *The thieves quarrelled ----- one another ----- how to divide the loot.*

A. to B. for C. over D. with

7. We are grateful ----- Mary ----- her help and encouragement.

A. about B. to C. of D. for

8. They complained ----- the receptionist of the hotel ----- the service.

A. for B. about C. on D. to

9. The representatives negotiated ----- the commander ----- release of the prisoners.

A. with B. on C. about D. for

10. You are responsible----- the manger ----- the petty cash.

A. with B. for C. on D. to

PART TWO

TASK III

1-Please fill in each gap with a suitable preposition.

An Open Letter from Prof. Charles and Mrs May Wan Kao

Since the announcement on 6 October 2009 that Charles has been awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physics. We are overwhelmed by the sea of congratulatory messages from so many people, and the many requests (1) _____ interviews from the media.

A Nobel Laureate of Chinese ethnicity is a rare event and we understand the outpouring (2) _____ happiness and pride (3) _____ our people throughout the world wherever they live. The Nobel Prize is an international prize and has been awarded (4) _____ work done internationally. Charles Kao did his primary research in 1966 at Standard Telecommunication Laboratories (STL) in Harlow, UK. Finally, he came to CUHK, Hong Kong in 1987 to pass on his expertise in fiber optical to a new generation of students and businessmen. Charles really does belong (5) _____ the world!

In this open letter, we would like to thank all who have concerned (6) _____ his health. Unfortunately there is no cure at present for Alzheimer's. Charles shares this problem of coping (7) _____ Alzheimer with other eminent persons, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, to name a few. Charles keeps fit playing tennis and other exercises. He does not smoke, and he engages (8) _____ many activities.

He is eminently proud (9) _____ his past achievements and excited (10) _____ becoming a Nobel Laureate an unexpected award. The press and media have interviewed him and he is happy. So he is more than ready (11) _____ a quiet and undisturbed life now, and he asks that the media respect this.

Our greetings to everyone in Hong Kong, to staff, faculty and students past and present of CUHK, and all our very good friends especially our tennis friends. Thanks for all your good wishes and congratulations. Now you know who is responsible (12) _____ the fiber optical

cables that enable all the excessive information, both true and false, good and bad, that circulate on the Internet.

Adopted from <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/cpr/charleskao/letter-e.html>/13 October 2009.

2- Please supply the following sentences with correct preposition.

1. *Obviously you need to adapt ----- changing circumstances.*
2. *All Hong Kong people were concerned ----- the recent economic crisis.*
3. *Mary is entirely independent ----- her parents.*
4. *He should be praised-----his honesty.*
5. *All the police officers were equipped ----- shields to defend themselves against the rioters.*
6. *Young people are the most susceptible ----- advertisements.*
7. *He has become addicted ----- drugs very early.*
8. *Such behavior detracts ----- your beauty.*
9. *She took her revenge ----- him for leaving her by smashing up his car.*
10. *If we lose the case we may be liable ----- the costs of the whole trial.*
11. *Parents enjoy boasting ----- their children's achievements.*
12. *The report recommends that more resources be devoted ----- teaching four year olds.*
13. *My sister is allergic ----- wool.*

ASK IV

Please translate the following sentences into English.

- 1- *إعترف القاتل بالجريمة أمام القاضي.*
- 2- *هيلين ماهرة في إعداد أطباق شهية .*
- 3- *يتألف فريق كرة القدم من أحد عشر لاعباً.*
- 4- *إن للأشجار والزهور فوائد كبيرة فهي تقلل من نسبة التلوث البيئي.*
- 5- *أنا أسف لأنني لم أتمكن من الرد على رسالتك البارحة.*
- 6- *كانت السيدة سميت مندهشة من كلام زوجها.*
- 7- *يرحب وزير الخارجية بالوفود المشاركة في القمة العربية.*

- 8- نعيشُ في عصر التكنولوجيا المزدهم بالمخترعات الحديثة.
- 9- تنقسمُ المطارات في دول العالم إلى محلية ودولية.
- 10- يهدف مشروع محو الامية إلى التطور التكنولوجي في الزراعة فضلاً عن تعليم القراءة والكتابة .
- 11- ليس الكتابُ مقتصراً على بحث الامور السياسية.
- 12- هل صوت لصالح الرئيس الجديد؟
- 13- إن الخسائر الناتجة عن الحروب فادحة مما يوجب أن نعمل معاً لحل مشاكلنا سلمياً.
- 14- هل كانت إيمي خائفة من الظلام؟
- 15- تنعم الدول المتقدمة بثورة ثقافية تتمثل في مكتبات الاطفال والشباب في كافة المدن والقرى.
- 16- ينبغي على القادة السياسيين أن يكونوا على دراية بمطالب الشعب.
- 17- لقد خرموا من حقوقهم المدنية كافة بموجب قرار المحكمة.
- 18- تقلد السيد جورج منصب سفير في واشنطن .
- 19- إن الجبال تغطي بالثلوج في الشتاء.
- 20- كان جزء كبيراً من القارة الافريقية تحت سيطرة الامبراطورية البريطانية.
- 21- إن الالتزام بالأنظمة والقوانين يعد أمراً إجبارياً.
- 22- هذا المعدن مقاوم للتآكل والصدأ.
- 23- كان أحمد ينسأ من الحصول على وظيفة.
- 24- كانت لورا غيورة من نجاح أختها .
- 25- أحب بيل أخته كثيراً وما يزال موتها يؤثر فيه بوضوح.