

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.