

## Collocational Competence in English Language Teaching: An Overview

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### Abstract

Despite its prime importance for language proficiency, collocational competence is one of the most neglected areas in vocabulary studies and second language teaching/learning. This negligence is the underlying motive for writing the present paper. Hence, the paper aims at 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 brief introduction to the topic, and offers an overview of relevant definitions and classifications. This is followed by a summary of the importance of teaching/learning collocations, and a list of relevant lines of research in collocation studies. The last part presents a number of recommended activities that English language instructors can implement in their classroom. The paper is thus helpful to both researchers and language instructors as it sheds the light on pertinent areas for research and recommends useful activities for teaching collocations.

**Keywords:** collocational, competence, English language teaching, lexical competence, second language learning, vocabulary studies,

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## Introduction

For long decades, the focus in second language (L2) acquisition and language teaching studies was placed on the study of grammar and, to a much lesser extent, pronunciation neglecting the importance of vocabulary learning. This was due to a sweeping misconception that vocabulary acquisition could take care of itself (Decarrico, 2001). More recently, however, and especially starting the 1970s and 1980s, many voices highlighted the importance of vocabulary acquisition/learning (e.g., Wilkins, 1972) and cast doubt on the “natural” acquisition of vocabulary by L2 learners. A number of studies also proved that vocabulary plays a significant role in language proficiency, such as reading comprehension (Beck et al., 1987) and writing production (Laufer, 1994; Read, 2002), and that poor vocabulary proficiency is a common cause for incompetent communication (Chastain, 1988). These voices and findings led to a revival of interest in vocabulary acquisition/learning and urged a number of researchers and practitioners to pay more attention to vocabulary studies.

Word knowledge is of special significance to vocabulary acquisition/ learning. According to Nation (2001), word knowledge involves knowledge of word form, word meaning and word use. The aspect of word form refers to the spoken and written forms of words as well as their morphological composition. As for the aspect of word meaning, it entails knowledge of a number of constituents, including reference, sense, connotative meaning and sense relations. The last aspect, word use, refers to knowing the grammatical, lexical and stylistic constraints on the use of words in the linguistic context. Among the three aspects of word knowledge, the last aspect received the least attention despite its significance to accurate language use. The present paper falls under studies of word use, and more specifically the lexical constraints on using words in context. The paper focuses on the lexical combinations of words or, in other words, word collocates. With the aim of raising awareness to the importance of this language phenomenon, widely known as collocation, encouraging more research in the area and urging language instructors to give it due attention, the paper reviews some pertinent definitions/categories, highlights the significance of collocations, summarizes the main relevant lines of research and suggests a variety of classroom activities to teach collocations.

## II. What are collocations?

Since the early introduction of the notion of “collocation” by Palmer (1938) and its first use as a technical term by Firth (1957), a number of definitions have been advanced for the term “collocation”. A clear and well-phrased definition is Lewis’s (1997) who explained that “collocations are those combinations of words which occur naturally with greater than random frequency.” (p.44). Hence, collocations refer to word combinations that occur consistently together. Any word combinations that do not exhibit frequent co-occurrence are not classified as collocations. For example, *blonde hair* is a collocation, but *black hair* is not normally categorized as a collocation.

An important characteristic of collocations is their arbitrariness. The choice of the constituent words does not follow any logic, but is only based on linguistic convention (Lewis, 1997). There does not seem to be any logic why *good chance*, *high probability* and *strong likelihood* are acceptable collocations in English while *strong chance*, *good probability*, and *high likelihood* are not (Farrokh, 2012). In fact, this arbitrariness is the only explanation why “we say to *break rules* but not to *break regulations*; to *hold a funeral* but not to *hold a burial*; to *make an attempt* but not to *have an attempt* and to *have a try* but not to *make a try*,” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 170). It is also this arbitrariness that makes acceptable collocations vary across languages. For example, Wray

(2002) observed that “in English you *run a business*, but in German you *lead it*.... In English you *lie in the sun*, but in Russian you *lie on it*,” (p. 73).

In addition to the arbitrary nature of collocations, which requires memorizing possible word combinations in every language for effective production, the meaning of words may be determined by their collocates. That is what some linguists refer to as a collocationally restricted meaning (e.g., Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). For example, the meaning of the word *white* changes in each of the following collocations: *white coffee*, *white wine*, *white noise*, *white man* and *white lie*. Likewise, a full understanding of the word *heavy* requires knowing its meanings in *heavy man*, *heavy rain*, *heavy meal*, *heavy traffic* and *heavy smoker*.

The literature includes different classifications/ categories of collocations. Some of these classifications rely on the word class of the combining words. For example, Benson et al. (1986) divide collocations into two major groups – lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. Lexical collocations constitute of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs whereas grammatical collocations include a noun, verb or adjective combined with a preposition or another grammatical structure, such as infinitives or that clauses. Below is a selected list of collocations:

### **Lexical collocations**

Verb + Noun (e.g., *compose music*; *revoke a license*)

Adjective + Noun (e.g., *strong tea*; *rough estimate*)

Noun + Verb (e.g., *bees buzz*; *bombs explode*)

### **Grammatical collocations**

Preposition + Noun (e.g., *in advance*, *at anchor*)

Adjective + Preposition (e.g., *afraid of*; *interested in*)

Noun + Infinitive (e.g., *He was a fool to do it.*)

Following the same pattern of classification, Lewis (2000) listed other types of collocations including the following:

Adverb + Adjective (e.g., *extremely inconvenient*)

Verb + Adjective + Noun (e.g., *revise the original plan*)

Compound noun (e.g., *fire escape*)

Binominal (e.g., *backwards and forwards*)

Other researchers classified collocations through placing them on a continuum (e.g., Abdul Ridha et al., 2011). At one extreme of the continuum come the free combinations with the highest degree of productivity, semantic transparency, and substitutability of items for the constituent elements. At the other extreme are word combinations with an idiomatic meaning that are least productive, most opaque in semantics, and the most frozen in terms of substitutability of elements. All along the continuum and between the two extremes lie different collocations with varying degrees of restriction.

Following the continuum-mode of classification, Carter (1987) divides collocations into four categories based on the strength of their restriction. According to him, unrestricted collocations (e.g., *take a look/ a holiday/ a rest/ time*) involve words that collocate freely with a number of lexical items whereas semi-restricted collocations (e.g., *harbor doubt/grudges/uncertainty/suspicion*) consist of elements that are not easy to replace. The other

two categories include familiar collocations (e.g., *unrequired love*; *lukewarm reception*) whose elements collocate on a regular basis, and restricted collocations (e.g., *dead drunk*, *pretty sure*) that are fixed and inflexible.

Lewis (1997) classifies collocations into four groups: strong, weak, frequent and infrequent. The distinction between strong and weak collocations is based on their fixedness and restriction whereas frequent and infrequent collocations are determined based on frequency of occurrence. Strong collocations, such as *drink beer* and *drug addict*, are tightly connected and function like single words. Weak collocations, however, consist of words that often occur with many other collocates, such as *nice day* and *good chance*. Combining strength and frequency results in four different types of collocations; (1) strong and frequent collocations, (2) strong and infrequent collocations, (3) weak and frequent collocations and (4) weak and infrequent collocations. In relation to the collocational continuum, Lewis (2000) argues that most collocations are found in the middle of the continuum. He believes that the largest number of collocations can be described as medium strong (e.g., *magnificent house*; *significantly different*), followed by common collocations (e.g., *fast car*; *have dinner*). In his view, strong collocations (e.g., *avid reader*; *budding author*) are quite rare.

Hill (2000) introduced a similar classification that categorizes collocations into unique, strong, weak and medium-strength. Unique collocations are fixed and are highly predictable. For example, the verb *shrug* only combines with *shoulders*, not any other part of the body. Strong collocations include words that collocate with very few other words. An example here is *rancid* that collocates with only a few words such as *butter* and *oil*. Weak collocations contain words that combine freely with many other words and have a predictable meaning. Relevant examples include *dark green*, *light green*, *pale green*, *bright green*, *emerald green*, *lime green*, *lush green*, *rich green*, *olive green*, *dull green*, etc. Finally, medium-strength collocations are similar to weak collocations but constitute much more difficulty for language learners. Learners may know the individual words in the collocation, but are not familiar with the collocation as a whole. For instance, the word *key* is relatively easy for language learners, but they would not normally know the combination *a key person*.

### III. Importance of collocations for second language learners

The previous section already indicates the importance of teaching/learning collocations for L2 learners in three ways. First, it must be clear by now that collocations are arbitrary, which means that they lack predictability. Attempts at guessing which words co-occur are likely to fail and result in deviant word combinations. Instead, L2 learners need to memorize collocations as single units. Second, it has already been highlighted that collocations may determine the meaning of words. Reference in this respect has already been made to the words *white* and *heavy*. Another example can be the word *chair* whose meaning changes completely in these two collocations: *department chair* and *vacant chair*. Third, collocations vary greatly across languages. L2 learners need to understand that there is nothing as one-to-one correspondence between two languages regarding collocations.

In addition, it is important to learn collocations due to their frequency of occurrence and their facilitatory effect on language processing. Hill (2000) estimates that “collocations are found in up to 70% of everything we say, hear, read, or write,” (p. 53). Similarly, Lewis (2000) considers collocations as the most common and most representative of English multi-word expressions. A language phenomenon with such high frequency of occurrence deserves considerable attention. Besides, the use of pre-fabricated chunks reduces processing effort, and enhances language

comprehension and production (Cantos and Sanchez, 2001; Wiktorsson, 2003; Schmitt, 2004). It is thus highly recommended to train learners on the identification, memorization and retrieval of ready-made collocations instead of letting them create deviant word combinations. As Gleason (1982) puts it, “working on the second language acquisition indicates that the second language learners begin not so much with generative systems as with chunks, prefabricated routines, or unopened packages,” (p. 355).

Finally, collocations enormously contribute to efficient language comprehension and production. Regarding comprehension, memorizing chunks helps learners predict the content of texts, and automatically enhances comprehension. Carter and McCarthy (1988) state that “collocations teach students expectations about which sorts of language can follow from what has preceded,” (p. 75). As for production, a number of researchers have highlighted that the correct use of collocations enhances fluency and makes one’s speech much more comprehensible and native-like. For example, James (1998) asserts that “adherence to the collocational conventions of a foreign language contributes greatly to one’s idiomaticity and native-likeness, and not doing so announces one’s foreignness,” (p. 152). Likewise, Nation (2001) concludes that “all fluent and appropriate language use requires collocational knowledge,” (p. 318).

In conclusion, collocational competence is considered a key component of language competence. The fact that collocations are arbitrary, highly frequent in natural language and unpredictably varied across languages calls for special attention to their teaching in L2 classes. In addition, collocations largely contribute to the definition of word meanings, reduces processing load during language use and support learners on the path of efficient comprehension and production. It is due to this importance for collocations that research studies are on the rise in this area.

#### **IV. Research on collocations**

Due to the significance of collocations, a number of researchers, especially recently, have conducted varied studies in this domain. Fan (2009) made two relevant observations. First, most studies use two types of techniques; either elicitation techniques, such as translation tests, multiple choice, gap filling and grids, or production data, which involve the analysis of students’ writing in regards to the use of collocations. The elicitation techniques often require the participants to produce single collocates, which fails to reflect the natural performance of participants. Similarly, analyzing the natural participants’ production (e.g., paragraphs or essays) lacks tight control over writing content and fails to examine low-frequency collocations. Second, most studies emphasize certain structures of collocations, including verb + noun, adjective + noun, adverb + adjective and verb + preposition. This emphasis has produced relevant results to particular types of collocations, but has not really resulted in a deep understanding of collocational use in general.

In addition to these observations, three characteristics of collocational studies in English as a second/foreign language have been noted. The first characteristic is that researchers make use of different well-known corpora and dictionaries to verify the acceptability of collocations included in their elicitation tasks or their participants’ production. Among the frequently used corpora are the British National Corpus and the Contemporary Corpus of American English. As for dictionaries, examples include Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary and Oxford Collocation Dictionary for Students of English. Another characteristic relates to the use of questionnaires. Questionnaires are mostly employed to examine language learners’ perceptions regarding collocations or to investigate the effect of language exposure on collocational competence. Finally, most studies state the proficiency level and first language of the

participants, which has proved useful to avoid overgeneralization of results. This has also helped identify important gaps in research. For example, the collocational knowledge of low-proficient learners has not yet received sufficient attention.

The remaining part of this section attempts to provide an overview of common lines of research in collocation studies. For each line of research, only one example study will be summarized due to space limitation. However, it is worth mentioning that each of the lines of research referred to in the present paper covers a wide range of studies. Among the most researched areas in this regard has been the EFL (=English as a Foreign Language)/ESL (=English as a Second Language) learners' receptive and/or productive knowledge of collocations (e.g., Siyanova & Schmitt, 2008; Alsakran, 2011). In his paper entitled "collocability as a problem in second language production," Brashi (2006) examined EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of verb + noun collocations using a blank-filling test and a multiple choice test. The results showed that the participants performed better at the receptive level than at the productive level in regard to verb + noun collocations.

Another line of research relates to the difference in collocational competence between native and non-native speakers (e.g., Waller, 1993; Durrant & Schmitt, 2009). Waller (1993), for example, collected written texts by native speakers of English and advanced English language learners at near-native proficiency. Comparing the use of collocations in the two types of texts, the results showed that the advanced learners' use of collocations is the most tangible marker of their non-nativeness. Waller (1993) mentions that deviant use of collocations was only noted in the texts produced by non-native speakers. However, lexical errors other than collocations as well as syntactic errors were found in texts written by both native and non-native speakers. He thus concludes that the use of collocations may create "a foreign accent in writing," (p. 224).

Some researchers have also analyzed different types of collocational errors and traced the sources of these errors (e.g., Abdul Ridha & Al-Riyahi, 2011; Hong et al., 2011). A case in point is Darvishi (2011) who investigated the collocational errors in EFL college learners' writing in a paper published at the International Conference on Education Research and Innovation. Analyzing thirty eight assignments and thirty eight in-class practices by 68 sophomore university students, Darvishi (2011) concluded that ignorance of rule restriction was the major source of collocational errors in the learners' production. He also identified other sources for errors, including mother-tongue interference, lack of the collocational concept and shortage of collocational knowledge. The study also made use of a questionnaire to explore the participants' perceptions of difficulty in collocations. The results showed that learners' perceptions did not match with the types of collocational errors in their writings.

Studies have also addressed the development patterns of ESL/EFL learners' collocational knowledge (e.g., Li, 2005; Zhang & Chen, 2006). In this regard, Gitsaki (1996) provided many valuable insights. She examined 275 Greek learners of ESL at three different proficiency levels (post-beginner, intermediate, and post-intermediate) using three measurements (essay writing, a translation test and a cloze test). The translation and the cloze tests measured cued production of collocations whereas the essay writing showed the learners' free production of collocations. All the target collocations in the cued production tests came from the learners' textbooks and did not match with collocations in their mother tongue. The results of the study were extremely interesting. First, they showed that grammatical collocations are easier to acquire than lexical collocations. Among the lexical collocations, the type that proved most challenging for learners was verb + noun collocations. Second, the post-intermediate group demonstrated the most

accurate use of collocations. Finally, the study supported the existence of a positive correlation between the development of language proficiency and collocational knowledge.

Another interesting research question that is frequently addressed in collocation studies concerns the factors affecting L2 learners' ability to learn collocations (e.g., Hussein, 1990; Gitsaki, 1996). An intriguing study here is Shehata (2008) who explored the effect of learning English in an EFL context versus an ESL context on collocational competence. A total of 97 advanced Arabic-speaking English language learners were recruited for the purpose of the study. Thirty five participants were studying at Ohio University in the United States while the remaining sixty two were majoring in English at an Egyptian university. Five different instruments were used in the study; namely, a self-report questionnaire, two fill-in-the-blank productive tests, an appropriateness judgment receptive test and a vocabulary recognition test. The author reported that ESL learners outperformed EFL learners in all receptive and productive tests, which highlights that an ESL learning context is more supportive for collocational development than an EFL learning context.

The correlation between English language learners' knowledge/use of collocations and their English language proficiency has also triggered some significant collocation studies (e.g., Zhang, 1993; Sung, 2003). For instance, Hsu (2007) investigated the relation between the Taiwanese college English language learners' use of collocations and their writing. Analyzing the writing of 41 English majors and 21 non-English majors, the study attempted to answer two important questions: (1) does the participants' frequent use of collocations correlate with their writing scores and (2) does the participants' varied use of collocations correlate with their writing scores. The study results showed a significant correlation between the participants' frequency of lexical collocations and their scores in online writing tasks. Similarly, a significant correlation was found between the participants' variety of lexical collocations and their online writing scores.

All the summarized studies above were conducted in the context of general English. Yet, the field of English for Specific Purposes has had its share of collocational studies as well (e.g., Ma & Lee, 1997; Gledhill, 2011). Wu (2003), for example, compared the knowledge of information technology and internet collocations among three groups; (1) non-native Computer Science and Information Engineering (CSIE) university students, (2) non-native English university students and (3) native English speakers with no IT background. Employing a sentence completion test and a multiple choice test, the author showed that the CSIE students demonstrated better command of collocations related to their area of specialization than English students. Yet, their collocational knowledge still proved much less developed than native speakers despite the latter's unfamiliarity with the field of IT and their moderate amount of exposure to IT-related information. Hence, it seems that frequent exposure to collocations in a certain field gives advantage to non-English majors with ESP collocations in comparison to English majors, but not to native speakers of the language.

A final line of research explored in this paper is more pedagogy-oriented. Some rigorous research studies have attempted to examine the effect of explicit teaching on the development of collocational competence (e.g., Mahvelati & Mukundan, 2012; Pirmoradian & Tabatabaei, 2012). An important study is Hsu's (2002) who examined the effect of teaching lexical collocations on the development of Taiwanese EFL learners' collocational proficiency in a one-month, intensive, business English workshop. The researcher examined different relevant materials including the participants' writing tasks, the teacher's class notes, pre- and post-tests and videotaped records of the participants' interviews, presentations and classroom activities. The results came in favor of the explicit teaching of collocations on the development of

collocational competence. The results also demonstrated a slight positive relationship between the learners' use of lexical collocations and their overall language proficiency. Hsu (2002) hence concluded that collocations must be explicitly taught in the EFL classroom to support learners' efforts to master the L2.

### V. Teaching collocations

The explicit teaching of collocations has been supported by a number of researchers in addition to Hsu (2002). For instance, Farghal and Obiedat (1995) pointed out that "the highlighting of collocation aspects of lexical items is as important as teaching them individually. This, we believe, is the sole way of nurturing the active use of language and helping the foreign learners construct lexically as well as grammatically acceptable sentences," (p.3). Likewise, Hill (2000) stated that "collocation should play an important part in our teaching from lesson one," (p. 60). Similarly, Fan (2009) highlights the importance of teaching collocations by mentioning that "since collocational use is not rule-governed and, in most cases, arbitrary and idiosyncratic, it is important for teachers to raise the awareness of L2 learners to this problematic aspect of language," (p. 120).

Studies on collocational competence have produced significant implications for teaching collocations and provided recommendations in this regard (e.g., Brashi, 2006; Fan, 2009; Farrokh, 2012). In the present paper, emphasis will be placed on four recommended activities; namely, (1) awareness raising, (2) identification of collocations, (3) receptive knowledge, and (4) productive knowledge. Each area is important to help enhance learners' knowledge and use of collocations, and thus improve mastery of their L2.

First, raising learners' awareness of collocations comes in line with the noticing hypothesis (Schmitt, 1990; 1994) which emphasizes the importance of learners' conscious processing and identification of language for efficient language learning. Awareness raising activities can cover a number of collocational aspects. L2 learners need to know the meaning of collocations, especially if they lack familiarity with the term. They should also be made aware of the importance of collocations and the lack of correspondence between collocations in their first and second languages. It is necessary here to let students see the difference with concrete examples from their two languages, whether through providing examples in class or discussing the erroneous collocations produced by learners due to interlingual transfer.

Learners' awareness must also be raised regarding the arbitrary nature of collocations, the skill of chunking and the collocational aspect of synonymy. Knowing that collocations do not follow clear logic, but rather rely on mere linguistic convention, will make learners pay more attention to collocations and exert more effort to learn them. Besides, learners must be trained on the skill of chunking, which enables them to better identify collocations in texts, and hence supports their learning. In addition, learners must realize that synonyms vary greatly in collocational behavior (e.g., *tall man*, *long ruler* and *high building*). This information will encourage learners to be more careful while choosing among synonyms.

Once made aware of collocations, learners need to be trained on the identification of collocations in different texts. In this regard, learners must be trained to identify useful collocations in oral/written texts. They should also be encouraged to explore the collocations provided in good monolingual English dictionaries. Some dictionaries include the collocations in the example phrases/sentences while others highlight them using bold type, italics, etc. In addition to identifying collocations in texts and dictionaries, learners should be trained to make use of corpora, particularly the ones available online. Two good recommendations are the British

National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English. The corpora can be used for a variety of purposes; (1) to verify the accuracy of collocations through conducting a collocation search, (2) to check the frequency of occurrence of a given collocation in the corpus, and (3) to identify collocations in Key Word In Context extracts.

It is also important to engage students in a variety of collocational activities that enhance both their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. On the receptive front, gap-filling activities with words from a list/box can be adapted to introduce collocations. The example below from McCarthy et al. (2010) enhances the receptive knowledge of collocations by including collocations in a box for students' use in gap-filling:

Fill in the gaps with collocations from the box.

pay good interest/ set aside money / get an allowance

When Andrew was growing up, he was careful with his money. He \_\_\_\_\_ every week from his parents, and because he wanted to go to college, he \_\_\_\_\_ every month. He opened a savings account that \_\_\_\_\_, so his savings grew.

Another useful activity in this regard is “crossing odd words out” or what is sometimes known as “finding the intruder”. In this task, learners need to identify the word that does not collocate with a target word. McCarthy et al. (2010) also provide the following example:

Cross out the food that is the least likely to go with the preparation.

- a. smoked cheese / turkey / bread / meat
- b. fried noodles / yogurt / chicken / potatoes

Visual input enhancement has also proved useful (e.g., Rezvani, 2011). Highlighting frequently occurring collocations helps raise learners' awareness of the existence of collocations, and encourages them to recognize useful chunks. A relevant example (McCarthy et al., 2010) is shown below:

Listen. Are these statements about manners true in your country? Check (✓) true or false.

- a. It's rude to **cut in line**.
- b. You should try to **keep your voice down** in public.

Another interesting activity is the collocation bingo. In this activity, the learners are given a card with a number of words. Then, they are asked to find the target word in the bingo card that collocates with a number of other words. The activity below (adapted from Vasiljevic, 2008) serves as an illustrative example:

Find the target word in the bingo card that comes with these collocates.

pants	engineer
hill	glass
flavor	lady

Example delicious/ exquisite/ rich/ strong ..... flavor

1. rocky/ high/ rolling/ green (answer: hill)  
 2. flared/ baggy/ fitted/ boot-cut (answer: pants)

Matching collocates is another commonly used task to enhance learners' receptive collocational knowledge. Learners only need to match collocations along two or more columns. Boonyasaquan (2009) provides the following example:

Match the collocate in column B with the word in column A that is a good collocation.

Column A		Column B
(green)	1. business	a. brand
_____	2. company	b. balance
_____	3. sheet	c. green
_____	4. image	d. multinational

Finally, multiple choice questions are recommended to practice collocations at the receptive level. Learners are asked to identify the best collocate for a target word. The distracters provided can vary in their difficulty. For example, challenging tasks can include synonyms as distracters, which requires learners to choose the correct answers based on their collocational knowledge not the meaning of words. Brashi (2006) used the following task for the purpose of a research study:

Choose the verb that collocates with the *noun* (in *italics*) in the following sentences.

1. The couple \_\_\_\_\_ *a pact* not to talk about each other.  
 A. performed      B. gave      C. made      D. had
2. They are \_\_\_\_\_ *the promise* they made before the election.  
 A. ruining      B. breaking      C. demeaning      D. corrupting

As for productive knowledge, a variety of tasks can prove useful. For instance, Martynska (2004) asked learners to correct collocation errors in the task below:

Correct the underlined collocations errors in these sentences.

1. I have a terrible tooth pain.  
 2. You never change your brain. You're so stubborn.

Towards the same goal, Vasiljevic (2008) used a task known as "focus paraphrase." In this task, learners are required to paraphrase a given sentence using collocations. Prompts are provided to help learners produce the target collocations. Here is a relevant example:

Paraphrase the following sentences. You will use collocations from the options provided.

Example

There were many cars on the street that day.

Adjectives (strong / big / heavy)

Nouns (vehicles / transportation / traffic)

**Answer:** Traffic was heavy that day.

1. You should go to work after the weekend on Monday.

Verb (report/ record/ transform)

Noun (job/ profession/ duty)

**Answer:** You should report for duty on Monday.

2. At the time arranged in advance, a car stopped outside the bank.

Adjective (agreed / accepted/ confirmed)

Noun (time/ hour/ minute)

**Answer:** At the agreed hour, a car stopped outside the bank.

Another relevant activity, albeit controversial, is grid completion. In this task, learners need to complete grids with frequent collocates for target words. Although this enables learners to produce a set of collocates for every target word, the task may not provide learners with sufficient information on the usage of collocations (Nesselhauf, 2005). Below is an example from McCarthy et al. (2010):

Complete the collocations in the chart. How many ideas can you think of?

Verb + Noun	
earn / make / spend / save / waste	money
	a bank account
	an allowance
	cash
	a budget

In addition to using gap-filling activities to enhance learners' receptive knowledge of collocations as shown above, the same type of activity can be used at the production level. Only part of the missing word will be supplied this time, such as the first letter, syllable, etc. This was, for example, used by Alsakran (2011). An extract is included below:

Put the **verb** which best completes the sentence in the blank. Use the first letter as a clue.

**EXAMPLE:** My teacher was disappointed because I didn't *do* my homework.

1. It's true that we g\_\_\_\_\_ weight when we eat more than we can burn off.
2. Governments should t\_\_\_\_\_ the necessary actions to stop global warming.

Sometimes, learners can also be encouraged to use collocations in their speaking/writing through requiring the production of given collocations in their devised dialogues or written paragraphs. For example, students can be asked to write a weather forecast using these collocations:

**Adjective + Noun**

freak hailstorm/ heavy rain/ minor earthquake/ flash flood/ catastrophic wildfire

**Verb + Noun**

damage a building/ disrupt traffic/ injure people

The last recommendation is to design tasks that rely on both the receptive and productive knowledge. An example could be to ask learners to judge the acceptability of certain word

combinations. Acceptable collocations can be ticked while the unacceptable ones can be corrected. Here is a sample activity used in Alsakran (2011):

Decide whether the underlined part of the sentence is an acceptable collocation or not. Tick (✓) the acceptable collocations and correct the unacceptable ones.

1. The dentist will fix my artificial teeth.
2. Are you having second thoughts about coming to Brighton with me?

English language instructors can choose the activities that suit their teaching contexts best or devise their own. While teaching collocations, however, repeated encounters with collocations are important for efficient memory storage and fast retrieval. It is also important to select collocations that are active and appropriate. It is not advisable to teach collocations that learners will rarely encounter again in natural English. Finally, language instructors must carefully consider learners' needs while selecting the collocations they teach. For example, if learners are keener on developing their written proficiency, common collocations in the spoken mode, such as "kind of" and "sort of," may not constitute a teaching priority. Similarly, learners studying English in a certain university major (e.g., computer science, law or engineering) will be much more interested to learn relevant collocations to their field of study than general collocations or collocations related to other areas of specialization.

## VI. Conclusion

Collocational competence in L2 teaching/ learning deserves special attention from both researchers and language instructors. Negligence to this area could produce L2 learners with accurate, yet awkward and odd language. Focusing on studying individual words in the L2 without paying attention to acceptable word combinations requires learners to invent or create their own lexical patterns, which normally sound non-native. Besides, enhancing learners' collocational competence fosters their language proficiency, whether in comprehension or production.

It is this significance that has recently triggered some rigorous research on collocations. Researchers have examined the receptive/productive collocation knowledge of L2 learners, compared the collocation competence of native and non-native speakers, analyzed the types and sources of collocation errors by L2 learners and traced the development patterns of collocations among different levels of language proficiency. Research has also attempted to discover the factors that influence the development of L2 learners' collocational competence, explore the relation between collocational competence and language proficiency, study the development of collocational knowledge in the field of general language use or language for specific purposes and investigate the effect of explicit teaching on collocational competence. More lines of research on collocations are also developing.

As for language instructors, more attention to collocations has been noted recently. In addition to the numerous activities on collocations that are found in modern English language textbooks (e.g., McCarthy et al., 2010), special vocabulary books (e.g., McCathy & O'Dell, 2005) and dictionaries (McIntosh et al., 2009) solely address collocations nowadays. This has helped emphasize the importance of collocations in language teaching/learning, and has stimulated language teachers/teacher trainers and textbook writers of devising varied activities to improve English language learners' collocational knowledge. The present paper has attempted to offer a framework for these efforts through classifying the activities needed into four categories; (1)

awareness raising, (2) identification of collocations in texts/dictionaries/corpora, (3) developing the receptive collocational knowledge and (4) enhancing the productive collocational knowledge.

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