The Productive Knowledge Of Adjective-Noun Collocations By Moroccan EFL Students From Seven Universities

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Abstract: *This study aims at investigating the productive knowledge of "adjective-noun" collocations by Moroccan EFL students from seven universities in Morocco. To this end, a productive collocation test addressing 25 adjective-noun collocations administered to four hundred and sixty four BA students. This test is meant to measure these students' productive collocational competence. These participants were required to fill in the blanks with the most appropriate adjectives. Results revealed that these Moroccan students have considerable problems in this aspect of language. They used erroneous combinations yielding weird phrases such as: *make homework, *do decision ...etc. The use of such inappropriate collocations leads to communication breakdown.*
Keywords:*Adjective-noun collocations, Productive knowledge*

I.   Introduction

During the 50s, 60s, and 70s much attention was given to teaching grammar at the expense of vocabulary. Most of language teachers considered grammar as the crux and the engine of language (Waring, 1997; and Basanta, 2004). However, there was an indispensable shift to focusing more on teaching vocabulary in the 80s. As a matter of fact, vocabulary is very essential in any language. More importantly, word combinations or what came to be known as collocations constitute a very important part of vocabulary and of language at large (Bahns, 1991). Generally speaking, when we mention the word "vocabulary" we mean words or linguistic items. That is to say, by saying vocabulary we mean single words, however, mentioning the term "collocation" entails referring to the co-occurrence and co-existence of words together.

II.   Literature Review

Wallace (1982: 30) alleges that "words seldom occur in isolation". Hence, what is of paramount importance for language learners is how and what words are related and combined within a naturally-occurring discourse. In fact, in our daily discourse we tend to communicate using thousands of words collocated with each other. To put it differently, we don't use single words to convey a message but we rather put words together. Therefore, Wallace (1982) claims that being in the know of a word means being cognizant of its collocates.

In the same way, Benson, Benson and Ilson (1997: ix) shed light on the utility of collocations in language reception and production. In other words, EFL and ESL learners should not only give their attention to learning lists of single words, their pronunciation and their meanings. "If they wish to acquire active mastery of English, that is, if they wish to be able to express themselves fluently and accurately in speech and writing, they must learn to cope with the combination of words into phrases, sentences and texts."

For Hill (2000), collocations constitute 70% of both the received and produced language discourse. That is, collocations are pervasive and one cannot do without them because language is taken as multi-unit expressions. Practically speaking, these chunks can translate and voice out complicated ideas, a function that individual words cannot do. In this regard, Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) claim that ready-made fixed expressions help speakers not only express complicated ideas and produce natural speech, but they can give speakers the chance to quickly produce long meaningful sentences which are, in turn, easily discerned by interlocutors. In addition to that, Radhi (2013:51) claims that conveying a message through written or spoken discourse with fewer words and more precise meaning can only be achieved via the use of collocation. This is fostered by the following example that compares between the possibility of using collocations and not using them:

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1. We don't have enough things so that every person who wants one can have one.
2. We don't have "sufficient supplies" to "meet the demand".

Apparently, the first sentence is made up of (15) words. Besides, it is longer and less clear than the second sentence which contains less words (9), and conveys in turn a clear message through the use of the collocations: "sufficient supplies" (adjective-noun) and "meet the demand" (verb-noun). Hence, the use of collocation expresses many things with the use of few words.

In this respect, Hill (2000: 53-54-55-56) introduces nine motives for teaching collocations:

a. "The lexicon is not arbitrary". According to Hill, the lexicon is made up of sets of words, each of which contains related words. Once a speaker utters a word, it is likely that the listener will expect its right collocate. To exemplify, if a speaker says 'drink', "the listener's expectations predict a large number of possibilities: *tea, coffee, milk, mineral water, orange juice …* but there would be no expectations of *engine oil, shampoo, sulphuric acid*" (Hill: 53).

b. "Predictability". Predictability of collocations is related to the previous motive "The lexicon is not arbitrary". This reason is highly pertinent to the vocabulary items choice, because predictability is based on how words are stored in the lexicon.

c. "The size of the phrasal mental lexicon". It is commonly believed that a large proportion of our naturally-occurring language, be it spoken or written, is made up of chunks. In Hill's words "estimates vary, but it is possible that up to 7O% of everything we say, hear, read, or write is to be found in some form of fixed expression" (p: 53).

d. "The role of memory". During the 60's the role of memory was played down for the fact that learning words by heart did not yield good results. However, knowing collocations does not necessitate memorizing them directly, but as native speakers of a particular language we can retrieve a bunch of fixed expressions without direct memorization but rather through recurrent exposure and use. This means that language teachers should provide students with a rich input.

e. "Fluency". Fluency is better achieved through learning a vast number of collocations. These help L2 learners speak fluently and appropriately as they have access to pre-existing expressions. Students with rich collocations do not need to reconstruct new expressions and combinations.

f. "Complex ideas are often expressed lexically". When L2 learners know a considerable number of collocations they can easily translate complex ideas into simple linguistic entities.

g. "Collocation makes thinking easier". Actually, the fact that speakers can quickly voice their minds is attributed to their ability to use a spectrum of collocations. Undoubtedly, with many collocations in the mental lexicon, students find it easy to translate their thought into simple language.

h. "Pronunciation is integral". Students are encouraged to learn the pronunciation of collocations and fixed expressions as a whole.

i. "Recognizing chunks is essential for acquisition". Hill (2000) recommends language teachers to read texts loudly in class so that students can acquire language as chunks, because silent reading makes learners learn words as separate entities not as chunks.

According to the above studies (Bahns&Eldaw, 1993; Lewis, 2000; Hill, 2000), collocation is an error generating-area in view of the fact that language instruction does not take this seminal component into consideration. Therefore, it is imperative to make students aware of word combinability because results show that it is the deductive instruction of collocations that helps students improve their collocational productive competence. The explicit exposure to collocations will lead students to have a fluent production of ideas. Additionally, knowing collocations will make it easier for students to use appropriate and authentic language without taking much time thinking of what and how to say things. Thus, teaching collocations should be a prerequisite in language learning.

0.3 Empirical studies on Arabic-speaking learners of English

A careful investigation in the literature shows that there is a lack of empirical studies conducted on Arabic-speaking learners' knowledge of collocations. There are, relatively, few studies in this respect: (Hussein: 1998); (Mahmoud: 2005) and (Brashi: 2009).

To begin with, Hussein (1998) investigated the use of collocations by Arabic-speaking learners of English. A sample of 50 subjects took part in the main study in which they were asked to complete a cloze test composed of 30 items. The obtained data confirmed what other studies have found. This study demonstrated that Arabic-speaking learners of English have developed a poor collocational knowledge. Additionally, collocation errors represent the highest percentage of errors made by L2 learners. The students' collocational incompetence was attributed to transfer, synonymy, and avoidance as alternative strategies when faced with unknown collocates. Hussein (1998: 45) suggests some remedial strategies to avoid collocational errors. As a case in point, in order for students to reach a native-like communicative competence they should be exposed to

different texts extracted from famous newspapers and magazines containing daily and common language. Moreover, they have to select frequently used "fixed pairs", not single words.

Similar findings were obtained from an investigation by Mahmoud (2005) on 42 essays written by Arab university students majoring in English. According to this study, many considerable errors were made by Arabic-speaking learners of English. To illustrate, (64%) of collocations were produced incorrectly and (61%) of wrong collocations were due to interference from Arabic into English. Again, Mahmoud recommends a more deductive teaching of word combinations to make students cognizant of the importance of vocabulary in general and collocations in particular.

Brashi's (2009) study tried to examine the relationship between Saudi students' productive knowledge and receptive knowledge of verb-noun collocations. Twenty participants enrolled in their fourth year in English at Umm-Al Qura University were administered two tests: a gap-filling test and a multiple choice test. Results of this study support previous studies' findings. It is, then, pertinent to note that collocations constitute a very challenging area in language for English learners in general and Arabic-speaking learners of English in particular. This study found out that students' receptive collocational knowledge outstripped their productive collocational knowledge.

In the same vein, Shammas (2013) conducted a study on 96 Arab Master (MA) students belonging to four Arab universities to test their collocation use and comprehension. To achieve this, three questionnaires were administered to respondents; the first questionnaire contained 20 Arabic collocations to translate into English. The second questionnaire consisted of 2O English collocations to translate into Arabic, while the third instrument was made up of both Arabic and English collocations for the participants to match each one with its corresponding equivalent. Clearly, both the first and the second questionnaires try to gauge the participants' collocation productive knowledge; however the third questionnaire tests their collocation receptive knowledge.

0.5 Objectives of the study
This paper aims at exploring the Moroccan EFL students' performance with regard to Adjective-noun collocations.

0.6 Research Hypothesis
Moroccan EFL university students encounter considerable difficulties in using adjective-noun collocations.

III. Methodology
The productive collocation test that corresponds with adjective-noun structure was administered to 464 students enrolled in the English department (third year) from seven universities. This test tends to gauge the students' productive collocational knowledge. Students are required to fill in the blanks with the most appropriate collocates (adjective).

Table 1: *The percentage and number of participants*

University	Number of participants	Percent
Cady Ayad-Marrakech	76	16.4
My Soulaimane-BaniMalal	61	13.1
Hassan II-Mouhamadia	50	10.8
My Ismail-Meknes	55	11.9
Mohammed bnoAbdillah-Fez,	74	15.9
BnoToufail-Kenetra	84	18.1
bnoZohr- Agadir	64	13.8
Total	464	100

IV. Findings
The findings showed that these Arab university students face serious problems in translating collocations from English into Arabic and vice versa. This particular study confirms that the participants' mother tongue (L1) influences negatively the acquisition and use of word combinations. A glance at the results obtained from the third test shows that collocations constitute a real impediment in English use. In short, the receptive collocation knowledge of these Arab participants outweighs their collocation productive competence.

Table 2:*The percentage of correct and incorrect items in the productive (adj-n) collocations test*.

Items	Incorrect		Correct		Total
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
1. second thoughts	238	51.1	226	48.7	464
2. short cut	343	73.9	121	26.1	464
3. political parties	320	69.0	144	31.0	464
4. last chance	304	65.5	160	34.5	464
5. middle age	274	59.1	190	40.9	464

6. fastfood	272	58.6	192	41.4	464
7. black eye	267	57.5	197	42.5	464
8. fine arts	265	57.1	199	42.9	464
9. capital punishment	269	58.0	195	42.0	464
10. heavyrain	271	58.4	193	41.6	464
11. white lie	268	57.8	196	42.2	464
12. middle class	248	53.4	216	46.6	464
13. red tape	259	55.8	205	44.2	464
14. golden age	245	52.8	219	47.2	464
15. public opinion	255	55.0	209	45.0	464
16. soft drinks	262	58.5	202	43.5	464
17. damaged sofa	283	61.0	181	39.0	464
18. injured people	277	59.7	187	40.8	464
19. privatebeach	284	61.2	180	38.8	464
20. calmcountryside	285	61.4	179	38.6	464
21. deprived areas	263	56.7	201	43.3	464
22. casualacquaintances	284	61.2	180	38.8	464
23. heavy fine	303	65.3	161	34.7	464
24. prompt payment	330	70.9	134	28.9	464
25. deephatred	293	63.0	171	36.9	464

This table (2) presents some figures concerning the percentage of correct and incorrect adjective-noun collocations in the productive (adj-n) collocation test. The students clearly could not come up with the appropriate collocates to the given nouns. For the first collocation "second thoughts", it constitutes a challenge for 238 subjects while 226 came up with the adjective "second". The second collocation "short cut" seems to be a problem expression since 343/464 participants that is 73.9% of the answers were incorrect. In the same vein, the collocation "political parties" is also problematic as 320 of the students did not put the collocate "political" with the noun "parties". In what follows, 65.5% of the participants made odd word combinations regarding the collocation "last chance". Besides, 59.1% of the used adjectives were awkward whereas only 40.9% of the adjectives were appropriate with regard to the collocation "middle age".

The following collocations have approximately the same percentages of incorrect word combinations: 58.6% of incorrect word combinations for "fast food", "57.5% of incorrect word combinations for "black eye", 57.1% of inappropriate word combinations for "fine arts", 58% of unconventional word combinations for "capital punishment", 58.4% of unacceptable answers for "heavy rain", 57.8% of odd combinations for "white lie", 53.4% for incorrect word combinations for "middle class", 55.8% of incorrect word combinations for "red tape", 52.8% of incorrect answers for "golden age", 55% of inappropriate collocates for "public opinions", 58.5% of incorrect answers for "soft drinks", 56.7% for "deprived areas", and 59.7% for "injured people". However, some chunks represent a considerable difficulty for the majority of students: 61% of incorrect answers for "damaged sofa", 61.2% for both "private beach" and "casual acquaintances", 61.4% for calm countryside", 65.3% for "heavy fine", 63% for "deep hatred". Finally, the collocation "prompt payment" was a baffling collocation for 70.9% of the participants (330 students) failed to produce the adjective prompt along with the noun "payment".

The students were asked to fill in the blank with the most suitable adjective as a collocate for the given noun; we can use some adjectives with a noun but it should be consistent with the sentence meaning. For example, 58% of the participants did not succeed to use the adjective "capital" with the noun "punishment"; they used some adjectives like hard, bad, and crazy punishmentinstead. Yet it is acceptable to say hard punishment to describe a punishment and not to refer to "death sentence". According to the sentence context, the most suitable collocate for the noun punishment is the adjective "capital" and not "hard".

V. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper's findings show that the Moroccan EFL university students under study found it very hard to produce adjective-noun collocations. The figures best explain the incompetence of the participants in using the adjective-noun collocations. Therefore, the obtained mean score in this test is 40.2/100 which is very surprising. This means that students lack the adjective-noun collocational competence. These findings corroborate previous studies' results.

To begin with, Rayed A (2011) studied 68 Arabic-speaking learners' collocational competence in terms of verb-noun, adjective-noun, and verb-preposition collocations. The statistical results showed that most errors were found in the adjective-noun structure. Along with the same lines, Shehata (2008), in her thesis, studied the L1 influence on the use of collocations by Arabic-speaking learners of English in ESL and EFL environments. Two gap-filling tests: verb-noun and adjective-noun collocation tests were used in addition to other tests. The presented findings indicated insufficient adjective-noun collocation knowledge.

However, Ghaniabadi, Marjane, and Zareian (2015) conducted an empirical study on the use of adjective-noun collocations by thirty Iranian university students wherein they were required to write four essays on four different topics. The results indicated that the most frequent and the easiest collocational type was the adjective-noun collocation structure. Unlike the aforementioned study, the current paper found that the adjective-noun structure was a difficult area for the majority of the participants.

VI. Implications

This study has tried to explore the use of collocations by Moroccan EFL learners. A simple look at the results would tell us a lot about the importance of collocations in English and their connections with other language components. Thus, it is of paramount importance for textbook designers to incorporate a wide range of the most frequent collocations in addition to challenging exercises. It will also be better if teachers make their students aware of the common collocational errors and some important collocational items according to their level and make them aware of their grammatical and communicative importance through some examples. More research is needed in this area especially concerning successful ways of learning collocations from learner perspective and effective methods of teaching collocations from teacher standpoint.

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