

## **How to Develop Accuracy in Speech and Writing Skills at Tertiary Level? A Study Report**

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### **Abstract**

One important element of good descriptions is the choice of adjectives. A wide repertoire of adjectives will help in writing vivid descriptions. As language teachers it is our common experience that many of our students grope for words and lack in appropriacy of expression whenever a descriptive assignment is given. In that situation, they have to pay conscious attention to descriptive words and their usage. They have to focus their mind consciously on particular information and pay attention to that particular context in which the new word occurs along with its right combination. The purpose of the present paper is to help learners improve their knowledge of Collocations using newspaper articles. It was evident that the learners learnt right combination of words and expressions to be used in their oral and written communication to become more effective meaning makers.

**Keywords:** Attention, Noticing, Collocations, and Descriptive writing.

### **Introduction**

According to NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Services Company) President, only 25 percent of technical graduates are suitable for employment in the outsourcing industry because of their lack of abilities to speak or write well in English. There is a common feeling that the first year engineering English course is inadequate in providing the required communicative skills to enable the students to become competent enough to face and pass the campus interviews. Therefore the English Language teachers have to adopt a few feasible interventions to equip the students to enhance their verbal ability which is one of the basic requirements to be successful in job recruitments.

## Background

As a language teacher teaching to the first year engineering students I have noticed that most of the students lack good verbal and communication skills in spite of excellent aptitude and technical skills. Especially when I analyze their spoken language and writing assignments, I come across many inaccurate and incorrect collocations. A collocation is all about how likely two words occur next to each other, or it is a natural combination of two words. Most students have collocation problems. They lack collocation accuracy and use. This could be because of their callous attitude or lack of focus while reading. They do not put conscious effort to notice the right combinations of words or expressions. For example students write *do a mistake* instead of *make a mistake*, *heavy wind* instead of *strong wind*, *listening music* instead of *listening to music* etc., Most researchers agree that L2 learners often produce unacceptable verb+noun, adjective+noun (lexical collocations), and verb+preposition (grammatical collocations. Then the question arises why do learners make collocation errors? It is because of their lack of exposure to the language. Learners, who have the habit of reading extensively such as magazine articles, novels, newspapers etc., make less collocation errors than those who do not have such habits. Another cause of improper collocations could be mother tongue interference. In the classroom the English language teachers teach individual words but not collocations. I remember learning vocabulary from textbooks and being surprised that collocational information was often not included in the glossaries. Hence the need for an intervention is felt. As a result the interventional strategy of using newspaper articles to enable the learners to learn and make appropriate choice of words was taken up in the present study.

## Importance of Noticing and Attention

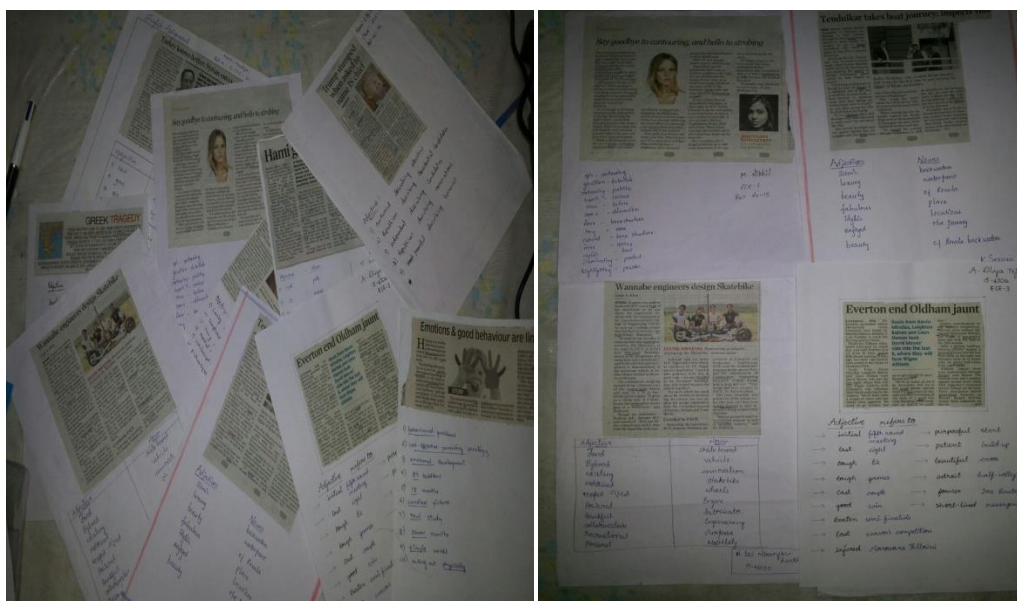
While learning a second language students come across many new words. In that situation, if they want to register the new word or its combination, they have to pay conscious attention to that particular pattern. Attention and Noticing are part of the process of encoding which is a process by which information and visual impressions are registered in the mind. Paying attention is the decisive thing in the process of learning. Noticing is focusing one's mind consciously on particular piece of information. As the learners notice new words along with their natural combinations and pay attention to them, they familiarize themselves with those combinations and retain them in their memory. An illustration of example is given through the following sentences:

- a) *The maximum number of fatal accidents has been reported this year.*
- b) *Messages may contain malicious software.*

In the above sentences they register the combination as *maximum number, fatal accidents and malicious messages*. (adjective+noun collocations)

## Methodology

There were 60 first year engineering students in the present study. The students were asked to collect and read a piece of article from the newspapers. The topic of the article could be of their own interest. After a close reading of the article they were asked to underline the nouns and adjectives preceding them. They prepared a list of adjectives and nouns for the underlined words. They were further instructed to draw two columns for adjectives and nouns respectively. Each student has to collect ten combinations of adjectives+nouns. In this way they were directed to notice and learn the appropriate and natural combinations of describing words pertaining to the contexts. The following illustration depicts it clearly.



Adjectives	Nouns
1. Personal	grooming
2. Human	values
3. Positive	attitude
4. Emotional	pattern
5. Collaborative	engineering
6. Thankful	fabrication
7. Recreational	purpose
8. Exciting	innovation
9. Final	touches
10. Visual	reference

## Further Activity

The students were divided into pairs. The first student will have his list of collocations in his hand and he speaks out the noun and asks the second student to give the right combination of adjective for the noun. If the second student gives the right or appropriate combination of describing word he gets a mark for it. If he fails to give the right choice of word, the first student provides the right adjective and gets a mark. In this way each student will have to play with 5 words per turn. The learners can henceforth remain alert to the English words and their natural combinations used in the news paper articles independently when they read for themselves. The teacher can further extend this activity by asking the students to write their own sentences using the collocations from their lists. Thus the language teacher can use this material to design more activities for their language classes to add freshness and motivation among the learners. Furthermore a Corpus of Collocations can be designed with all the collocations compiled by the students so that they can use it as a reference and resource for their day to day communication.

### **Learning Outcomes**

1. Students stop for groping for words and enhance their appropriacy of expression in their written and spoken communication.
2. They learn to pay conscious **attention** to descriptive words and their usage.
3. They realise **noticing** is an important skill where focusing one's mind consciously on particular information improves their proficiency.
4. They recognize the particular context in which a new word occurs along with its right combination.
5. Once the learners are able to learn the right combination of words and expressions to be used in their oral and written communication, they become more effective meaning makers.

### **Conclusion**

Students come across many English words and expressions in their daily life that they unconsciously learn from. Ironically, they ignore their significance. The language teacher can use texts from the newspapers to enable the learners notice (identify) and understand (pay attention for comprehension) the right collocations. These materials can be made use of as a resource for imparting lexical competencies. It is important that the learners learn the right combination of words and choice of words to be used in their communication. The purpose of the present study was to help the learners improve their knowledge of Collocations. It aimed to provide the information and practice which would help them understand and use them correctly. The students

in the present study enjoyed and appreciated learning collocations from the articles selected from their own choice. They further recognized the significance of collocations in improving their speaking and writing skills.

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