

## **Comparative Study of Collocation among the Languages**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper presents a comparative analysis Persian and English collocation and its function. The aim of this paper is to study collocation in Persian and English and investigate how collocation is used in Persian and English and what are the differences and similarities between these two languages from this point of view. The paper investigates the different functions of collocation and their use in Persian and English. Collocations are one of the areas that produce problems for learners of English as a foreign language. Iranian learners of English are by no means an exception.

**Key words:** collocation, comparative analysis, function, differences and similarities

### **1. Introduction**

Collocations seem to be important in learning a language because words are learned and used in context, and without knowing the proper context in which a word can be used, one cannot make a claim that he or she has mastered that word.

It is evident that lexical forms and specially collocations have important role in learning and teaching English as a foreign language, because in foreign language learning the effect of mother tongue interference arises during the learning process. Bahns (1993) pointed out that most EFL teachers mentioned that usually their learners had problem in choosing the correct combination of two (or more) words. Based on this point we can understand teaching

collocations and teaching when or how collocations should be used are essential elements in teaching English as a foreign language.

Xiao and McEnery (2006) argued that there is more research about collocations used in English, but there has been less research on collocations used in other languages which could enable us to compare English collocations with collocations found in other languages. For example, we do not find many research articles on collocations in Persian and contrast these collocations with collocations found in English, etc.

There are several difficulties associated with the study of collocations. For one thing, there is still a lack of consensus on their definition. Partington (1998) divides the definitions of collocations into textual (co-occurrence in a text), statistical (co-occurrence with greater than random probability) and psychological (co-occurrence due to a psychological link between words). Another difficulty with collocation is that there is no clear standard that would delimit the range of a word's collocation and identify a stable basis for their description.

### **Collocation Definitions**

Some of the different definitions of the term collocation are as follows:

- 1) "The way in which words co-occur in natural text in statistically significant ways" (Lewis 2000:132) .
- 2) "Tendency of two or more words to co-occur in discourse" (Schmitt 2000:76).
- 3) "The co-occurrence of two items in a text within a specified environment" (Sinclair, et al. 2004).
- 4) Collocations are defined as "strings of specific lexical items that co-occur with a mutual expectancy greater than chance, such as *rancid* butter and *curry favor*" (Nattinger and Decarrico 1992:36).
- 5) "The other words any particular word normally keeps company with" (James 1998:152).

The term *co-occurrence* is the common point included in these definitions. This co-occurrence converts two or more words into a chain, string or a chunk of words.

Based on the definitions, a question may be raised as to whether all chunks, strings or chain of words made by co-occurrence of two or more words may be called collocation. As we know there are different strings of words and prefabricated chunks in which the notion of co-occurrence is obvious. For example, consider these words: polywords, idioms, clichés, lexical phrases and collocation. Look at the following examples.

- 1) Kick the bucket.
- 2) Have a nice day.
- 3) Strong tea.
- 4) In a nutshell.
- 5) How do you do?

How can we distinguish collocation among the above mentioned chunks or string of words? Can we say which is idiom, cliché, polyword, lexical phrase or collocation? In order to avoid any mistaken use of other chunks instead of collocation in this study, it is required to make a distinction among all these strings of words that enables us to distinguish collocations accurately.

Nattinger and Decarrico (1992) have the following definitions for these terms.

**Idioms:** “Bits of frozen syntax whose meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its constituents”.

**Cliché:** They share frozenness with idioms, but the meaning can be understood from the components.

**Collocation:** “strings of specific lexical items that co-occur with a mutual expectancy greater than chance. These strings are not assigned particular pragmatic functions”.

**Lexical Phrase:** Collocations with pragmatic functions.

**Polyword:** Short lexical phrases that are treated as one word.

### **Distinguishing Collocation from Combined Words**

According to Kalbasi (1996), combined words are characterized as follows:

a) Similar to words, the combined words possess a stress with a different place depending on the grammatical type of words. For instance, in words “telephone booth” and “book seller”, the second word is stressed.

b) Pause is not allowed in the middle of word components, while it is possible doing so in both sides. Considering the word “telephone booth”, it cannot be uttered as “telephone, booth”.

c) Grammatical and lexical subordinators “(e)s”, “most”, “each” and “great” cannot place in the middle of components creating combined words, but can present in their beginning and at their end. Words like “factories”, “the most officious”, “at intersection corner” and “big chandelier” illustrate the issue.

### **Collocation Types in Persian and English Languages**

According to Nosratzadeh and Jalilzadeh (2011) collocations in Persian and English are divided into two main types:

1. Non-idiomatic collocations
2. Idiomatic collocations

In non-idiomatic collocations we can understand the meaning of the collocation where meaning of each word is included. We can get the total meaning from the meaning of its “components”, even if we have not heard the collocation before. But in idiomatic collocations we cannot get the total meaning of the collocations by putting together the meaning of each

component of that phrase. For example, in “door and wall” we have a non-idiomatic phrase for which we can get the meaning of the phrase from the components of the collocation.

### **Collocations’ Patterns**

Benson et al. (1986) classify restricted collocation into two categories:

**1. Lexical Collocation:** There are several different types of lexical collocations made from combinations of verb, noun, adjective, etc. Some of the most common types are:

1. **Adverb + Adjective:** (completely satisfied)
2. **Adjective + Noun:** (excruciating pain)
3. **Noun + Noun:** (a surge of anger)
4. **Noun + Verb:** (lions roar)
5. **Verb + Noun:** (commit suicide)
6. **Verb + Expression with Preposition:** (burst into tears)
7. **Verb + Adverb:** (wave frantically)

**2. Grammatical Collocation:** This type of collocations is made with a preposition and a main word (noun, adjective and verb) or two-word verbs. Based on Benson, et al., we have eight major types of patterns of grammatical collocation in English:

**Noun + Preposition** ability in / at

**Noun + to + Infinitive** a problem to do

**Noun + That Clause** we reached an agreement that...

**Preposition + Noun** On purpose

**Adjective + Preposition** Tired of

**Adjective + to + infinitive** easy to learn

**Adjective + that Clause** She was delighted that...

**Verb + Preposition** Believe in...

### **Translating Collocations**

While the previous sections dealt with collocations, their definitions and types, this part focuses on their translation. As mentioned, collocations play a vital role in translation. Some problems may occur in the translation of English collocations into Persian. The British scholar Firth (1957) who is the father of collocational studies in modern times, stated, "You shall know a word by the company it keeps" (p. 12). Therefore, collocation is a mode of expressing meaning: Meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level and is not directly concerned with the conceptual approach to the meaning of words. One of the meanings of *night* is its collocability with dark, and of dark, even as it collocates with *night* (Bahns 1973). Based on Machali (2000) translators and learners of English should be aware of the fact that some collocations may be register-specific. For example, while 'tolerable' and 'error' would normally not go together, they can be an acceptable collocation in Statistics. Failure to identify them in a text may cause a distortion of meaning.

### **Teaching Collocation**

Some of the studies have examined the importance of collocations in teaching and learning. For instance, Sadeghi (2009) compared the use of Persian and English collocations with respect to lexis and grammar by 76 participants who took a 60-item Persian-English test of collocations. The results of the study indicated that learners are most likely to face great obstacles in cases where they negatively transfer their linguistic knowledge of the L1 to an L2 context. The findings of this study had some immediate implications for both language learners and teachers of EFL/ESL, as well as for writers of materials.

Gorgis and Al-Kharabsheh (2009) compared the output of two translation tasks to find out the extent to which students of translation can translate Arabic contextualized collocations into English properly.

Webb and Kagimoto (2010) investigated the effects of three factors (the number of collocates per node word, the position of the node word, synonymy) on learning collocations. The results showed that when more collocations were learned, the number of collocates per node word increased. But the position of the node word did not affect learning. Synonymy had a negative effect on learning.

To teach English collocations to speakers of other languages, it would, of course, be very useful to have a rich variety of teaching material like collections of exercises and workbooks. As there is a growing awareness, in the field of EFL of the importance of collocations for the teaching and learning of truly idiomatic English (for this goal, collocations seem to be more important than idioms), we will probably see, in the not-too-distant future, the publication of (more) material for the teaching of collocations to learners of different levels of proficiency. Materials writers who intend to set out on this task should, however, bear in mind what was pointed out above: it will not be advisable to have the same selection of collocations for all learners of English as a Foreign Language. The collocations chosen for inclusion in such material will have to be different in each case, depending on the L1 of the learners.

### **Interference**

Brown (1984) mentions that the interference of the first language in the use of the second language is the paramount obstacle in second language learning. This makes it hard for the learner to learn L2. However, Brown (1984) points out the fact that what make learning a second language intricate and complicated are the differences between two linguistic systems. Solving the problem of differences is a basic assumption in second language learning. The difficulties in second language learning are compounded by these differences. However, not all difficulties should be considered due to the result of the differences between two linguistic systems. Differences also may be ranked in terms of complexity. One difference can contain a higher degree of difficulty in second language learning as compared to the other differences and vice versa. Difficulties in learning a second language can be categorized in an ascending order.

Ziahosseini (1999:pp14-15) suggests the following degrees of difficulty:

#### **Level 0: Transfer**

No difficulty is noticed in transferring an item from L1 to L2. This is due to the fact that there is no difference between the two languages in this case. It is called zero level because of absence of difficulty for the learner to transfer, so it is not challenging or problematic for the learner. Some phonemes and words such as *table*, *television* and *house* are some of the examples.

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### **Level 1: Coalescence**

One item in target language is used for two or more items in the native language. The distinction among items in the native language is disregarded by the learner. The word *cousin* is a good example in Persian language.

### **Level 2: Under-differentiation**

An item in the native language is deprived of equivalence in the foreign language. This item must be erased from the learner's mind.

### **Level 3: Reinterpretation**

An item is present in the first and second languages, but sometimes they are not equivalent. So, this similarity will result in overgeneralization. The sentence *We have visited Paris* has also the form of present perfect in Persian language as it is in English. The sentence *We are sitting in the class* is present continuous in English whereas it has the form of present perfect in Persian and this is the case in which overgeneralization is subject to happen due to the mentioned similarity.

### **Level 4: Over-differentiation**

This is the opposite side of level 2. An item in the target language is deprived of equivalence in the native language. They are the new items to be learned. The sounds [θ] and [ð] are among the examples.

### **Level 5: Split**

This is the opposite side of level 1. Presence of two or more items in the foreign language is noticeable for an item in the first language. The words *rancid, corrupt, decayed, rotten* and *faulty* have one equivalence in the first language (Persian) as well as the words *handcuff* and *bracelet* and also the words *monkey* and *auspicious*. If each of these equivalences is used interchangeably, the meaning is distorted and the communication is deviated from the original intent. As mentioned before, this is the case in which absoluteness is involved. In the other words, interchangeable use of one equivalence for the other is absolutely forbidden.

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## General Problems and Solutions

According to Armstrong (2005), students and translators face two main problems in translating collocations.

### The Difficulty of Generalization

Some English words collocate with one and the same word but they are not necessarily so in Persian. For example “dark night” has an identical collocation in Persian: ( سیاه شة ). We can also translate “dark color” into ( تیره رنگ ), and we can translate “dark age” into ( تاریک ادوار ), thus “dark” is not always ( تیره ) or ( سیاه ).

Also we say in Persian ( لطیف پوست ) for “soft skin” but we cannot say ( لطیف اب ) for “soft water”. So student should pay attention to these differences and find and use the correct equivalent for those collocations in different bilingual dictionaries. Thus, they cannot generalize the meaning of a word which collocates with different words. It can be different from one collocation to another and from one language to another.

### Variability of Collocations

Different collocations for the same meaning can exist in English but they may have one collocation or one meaning in Persian.

For example: “commit a mistake/ make a mistake” “شدن خطا مرتکبه”

Usually these equivalent collocations have one and the same translation in Persian. And it is not necessary for student to find different equivalent collocations in English.

### Conclusion

Because of the linguistic and cultural basis of “collocation”, collocations should be learned and acquired when someone will learn the foreign language. Greenbaum (1974) emphasized the importance of learning collocational size lexical units both in the early years of language acquisition and also in the continuing years of vocabulary development. In addition, to avoid

committing a mistake, students have to memorize the definition of the collocation, and be aware about the differences of collocations in English and Persian.

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