

## BETTER SENTENCE BUILDING SKILLS THROUGH COLLOCATIONS: A WAY TO NATURALIZATION OF ENGLISH SPEECH

Moehamad Ridhwan<sup>1</sup>  
Welly Ardiansyah<sup>2</sup>  
Koryati<sup>3</sup>

*Sriwijaya State Polytechnic –Indonesia*

**ABSTRACT:** *A language requires some certain ways of putting their words together to get some ideas across. These words have some relationship and bond that may escape the attentions of some EFL learners who rely merely upon grammatical skills and vocabulary to build sentences. It is true that grammatical structure connects all the words together to convey the meaning, but there is more to it than meet the eyes when ‘naturalness’ is also our concern. At times, the influence of one’s mother tongue over one’s diction in a foreign language is responsible for the production of unnatural expressions in that foreign language. Once this problem comes to surface, a better look at word pairing-habit in that foreign language should be a priority in which case collocations are the stars on the stage, worthy of our most attention.*

**Keywords:** *EFL students, diction, unnatural expressions, priority, collocation*

Some words have to go together to form a certain meaning. A change of one word in that combination will very possibly result in an awkward delivery of meaning which a native speaker of that language will sense. Collocation is all about which word should go with which to get a certain idea across without it being perceived as funny or awkward. According to Englishleap (2015, p.1), a collocation is a combination of words that are commonly used together; the simplest way of describing collocations is to say that they ‘just sound right’ to native English speakers. Other combinations that may mean the same thing would seem ‘unnatural’. In Exactly the same line of thought Cambridge Dictionary (2016, p.1) defines collocation as how words go together or form fixed relationships. This condition will lead the listener or reader to grasp the meaning without trying hard to make sense of it because these words are put together the way they always are.

English learners may combine English words by referring to word combinations in their own mother tongue. This might be useful on certain occasions but failure to make English sound natural does occur at times due to the lack of understanding on the importance of how the words should be matched together. For instance, in Indonesian language the term “*merapikan tempat tidur*” is a very common combination. However, it does not seem to be the case in English when translated verbatim. “Tidy up the bed” does not sound as normal as “make the bed”. Another common Indonesian word combination is “*tepukan yang gemuruh*”. “roaring applause” may sound funny to the native speakers of English, but “a round of applause” will sound just right. Collocations are developed through repeated use of combined words which become fixed expressions in that language. Such terms as ‘make an appointment’, ‘expect a baby’, ‘spoil one’s appetite’, ‘achieve one’s goals’, ‘have fun’, are examples of collocated pairs of words in English.

Students learning English should be made aware of the use of collocation along with their effort to improve their vocabulary. Being proficient in combining words properly (using correct collocations) will certainly be of great benefit to EFL students. They will be able to improve their speaking and writing skills because they are prepared with word combinations to construct their sentences. Using correct collocations also makes their English more like a native speaker; therefore, it is more easily understood. The better they use collocation, the more natural their English will be.

## **TYPES OF COLLOCATIONS**

There are seven types of collocations based on the following seven grammatical structures (The English Island, 2016, p.1):

1. Adverb + Adjective  
e.g. happily married, fully aware, painfully slow, widely believed, utterly appalled, etc.
2. Adjective + Noun  
e.g. deep sleep, low/high cost, maiden voyage, rich history, strong coffee, etc.
3. Noun + Noun  
e.g. bar of soap, business English, Round of applause, surge of energy, trade agreement, etc.
4. Noun + Verb  
e.g. Cats purr, dogs bark, engines roar, snakes hiss, snow falls, etc.
5. Verb + Noun  
e.g. Break a leg, get the message, give a speech, keep a secret, make the bed, etc.
6. Verb + Expression with Preposition  
e.g. burst into tears, filled with awe, roped into helping, swelling with pride, filled with horror, etc.
7. Verb with Adverbs  
e.g. smile proudly, clean thoroughly, whisper softly, speak loudly, criticize harshly, etc.

In addition, collocation can be divided into two types based on their strength (Cambridge dictionary, 2016, p.1). Strong collocations are where the link between the two words is quite fixed and restricted. Weak collocations are where a word can collocate with many other words. Let us now talk about this in detail. For example: Very few words can collocate with the noun *'wish'*. This makes *'wish'* a strong collocator. In sentences it is commonly found that the word *'wish'* goes together with *'make'*, *'express'*, or *'fulfill'*. It would definitely be weird to pair *'wish'* with, for instance, *create*, *build*, *break*, *say*, etc. A student learning English would probably make a sentence like 'He said a wish before unwrapping the present' in which occasion an English native speaker would feel more comfortable if the word *'said'* was replaced with *'made'*. Other strong collocations are *'whisk an egg'*, *'curly hair'*, *'winding road'*,

'*blissfully ignorant*', etc. Meanwhile, weak collocations represent themselves in the combination of words such as

- Big/enormous/large + house/lorry/cup
- Fast/shiny/expensive + car/motorbike/aeroplane
- Very/really/extremely + interesting/hot/generous
- Brown/straight/long + fence/hair/line

English-tutor.wikispaces.com (2016, p,1) adds one more type which is called fixed collocations. Fixed collocations are collocations so strong that they cannot be changed in any way. For example, you can say *I was walking to and fro* (meaning I was walking in one direction and then in the opposite direction, a repeated number of time). No other words can replace *to* or *pro* or *and* in this collocation. It is completely fixed. In addition, the meaning of some fixed collocations cannot be guessed from individual words. These collocations are called idioms. In brief, idioms are collocations, but collocations are not always idioms.

## HOW TO LEARN COLLOCATIONS

- a. Know that collocations do exist and are important to learn, make sure you recognize them when you see or hear them.
- b. Although collocations comprise more than one word, just consider them as single blocks of language. Think of them as individual blocks or chunks, and learn *strongly support*, not *strongly + support*.
- c. When you come across a new word, write down other words that come along with it (*remember rightly, remember distinctly, remember vaguely, remember vividly*).
- d. Spend more time reading. Reading is an excellent way to learn vocabulary and collocations in context and in a natural way as well.
- e. Be critical of how you put your words together and make some revision if you think that those words are not in a match. Put your new collocations into practice as soon as you get them and provide them with a context.
- f. Group your collocations under certain topics to make them easier to memorize (*time, number, weather, money, family*) or focus on a certain word with its partners (*take action, take a chance, take an exam*)
- g. Good Learners 'Dictionaries are very likely to provide you with lots of information on collocations, especially those of specialized dictionaries of collocations. (Englishclub, 2016, p.1)

## INDONESIAN COLLOCATIONS VERSUS ENGLISH COLLOCATIONS

Indonesian collocations may be translated verbatim into English and still they make correct collocations in English too. If this is really the case, it is going to be easy for Indonesian students learning English to deal with the English collocations. Look at the following examples:

<b>Indonesian Collocations</b>	<b>English Collocations</b>
Perang dingin	Cold war
Saksi mata	Eyewitness
Bulan madu	Honeymoon
Air mata buaya	Crocodile tears
Patah hati	Broken heart
Telanjang kaki	Naked foot
Tangan kosong	Empty-handed
Bakat tersembunyi	Hidden talent
Berdarah dingin	Cold-blooded
Keresahan sosial	Social unrest
Negara berkembang	Developing country
Buta warna	Color-blind
Efek samping	Side effect
Dibawah umur	Underage, etc.

However, it is not always the fact that English collocations are similar to their equivalents in Indonesian language. Here comes the challenge for the Indonesian students to be more careful in dealing with the English-collocated word pairs. Merely figuring them out on the basis of one's own mother-tongue may, at times, meet undesirable results. Take a look at the following examples:

<b>Indonesian Collocations</b>	<b>English Collocations</b>
Cinta monyet	Puppy love
Kutu buku	Bookworm
Kambing hitam	Scapegoat
Pegawai negeri	Civil servant
Gigi palsu	False teeth
Buaya darat	Playboy
Meninggal dunia	Pass away
Bahasa ibu	Mother tongue
Jalan buntu	Dead end
Operasi plastik	Plastic surgery
Salah sambung	Wrong number
Pesta perpisahan	Farewell party
Minyak angin	Medicated oil
Mahasiswa kedokteran	Medical student
dll.	

## **SENTENCE BUILDING AND COLLOCATIONS**

Think about a sentence as if it were a skeleton. The skeleton contains various bones and these bones are put together to form different parts of the body. So are sentences formed by words, the words are the bones and they are put together in different ways to form sentences (LEOnetwork, 2016, p.1). This statement suggests that making sentences is not so easy as just to blurt out words randomly and expect others to make out the meaning which is in our heads. There should be the beginning, the middle

or the end part of the sentence in which each word is justified to position themselves. The interconnection of the words themselves, in several languages, causes changes to the wordforms while the verbforms may not remain the same due to the adverb of time. In line with that, to make or to build a sentence carries quite a problem within itself as we are demanded to abide by the correct rules of the grammar. Therefore, being able to master the grammar is quite an accomplishment and it deserves the greatest appreciation. However, there is quite a little something that might stand in the way of our sentences to be regarded as good when this particular element is not considered. We are referring to the “*collocation*”. One of the most overlooked aspects of language learning (Phrasemix, 2016, p.1). But without it, a sentence, however good its grammar can possibly be, is still not well-built. A good sentence building should benefit from collocations which fall somewhere in the middle between vocabulary and grammar, a place less frequented by English learners but where more natural sentences, natural to the ears of the native speakers, are produced from. In addition, sentence building becomes less complicated since we consider two or more words as ready-made structural frames and prepackaged building blocks.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLOCATIONS**

So far, the writer has been stressing on the importance of collocation to make our sentences sound natural to the native speakers of English. How about the opinions of those whose mother tongue is English themselves? Do they care at all for the way we, the non-native English speakers, utilize our words in pairs in addition to the individual words? Are they just going to try to understand or excuse our wrong collocations by considering the fact that we are foreigners and our mistakes are, then, justifiable? Read the following statements they make:

- a. It is extremely important to know what words pair with each other. In the past, not many people knew about the idea of collocation. Teachers and textbooks did not usually provide information about it. Words were almost always presented by themselves. In recent years, language teachers have started to pay more attention to collocation, but you will still find a lot of books and courses that do not address it at all (PhraseMix, 2016, p.1).
- b. It is usually recommended to learn the gender along with the noun or the plural along with the singular or the feminine form of adjectives when studying vocabulary. But we should go a step further and include collocational information (as well as alternate meanings) for every word we learn (ielanguage.com, 2016,p.1).
- c. Students at every level need to be aware of the importance of collocation, as I believe collocation can be used not only to help learners understand and manage lexis but also to communicate ideas more effectively (Rachel Hunt, 2016, p.1).

The above statements do not represent the opinions of all native speakers of English about collocation. However, we, as English teachers, have no choice but are made convinced by those remarks that teaching collocation is basically no less important than teaching English vocabulary or grammar itself.

## TEACHING COLLOCATIONS

The following suggestion will be useful to help students get rid of or at least minimize the possibility of making lexical collocation errors:

1. Collocation should be taught directly and students' awareness of collocation should be raised to the point that they will find it necessary to work towards correcting their collocation errors when they make ones.
2. Besides specifically teaching collocations, language teachers should also present the students with the opportunity to practice them. Real life situations on which this practice is based will enable the students to properly use the word pairs in time of need or when they are having the real conversation.
3. As printed dictionaries on collocations are not a rarity, teachers should encourage students to make use of them constantly. Such dictionaries are also available online and students can download them in an instant to learn them (Shitu, 2016, p.1).

## CONCLUSION

Sentence building skills are not only about being good at arranging words in correct structural forms but they also concern how these word orders can produce straightforward meaning without the slightest of doubt. Being capable of using collocation is one of the requirements to produce natural sentences and therefore it is important that collocation be specifically taught to English learners. In this paper, some English writers have expressed concern about improper use of word collocated pairs and therefore, it adds to the necessity that these words combination be focused on even more in teaching and learning activities. Collocation helps sentences sound right to the native speakers and it makes task of building sentences become easier. All this is due to the fact that with collocation we treat certain word combinations as ready-made structural frames and prepackaged building blocks. On the other hand, there would be no good sentence building skill when parted from considering collocation in the making of sentences. In other words, collocation and sentence building skill have a mutual advantage toward each other and they are positively correlated.

## REFERENCES

- Combridge Dictionary. (2016). *Collocation from English grammar today*. Retrieved from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/about-words-clauses-and-sentences/collocation>.
- Englishclub. (2016). *Collocations*. Retrieved from <https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/collocations.htm>.
- Englishleap. (2016). *Collocations*. Retrieved from <http://www.englishleap.com/vocabulary/collocations>.
- English-tutor.wikispaces.com. (2016). *Strong, fixed and weak collocation*. Retrieved from <https://english-tutor.wikispaces.com/file/view/collocations-2.1-2.4.pdf>.

Hunt, R. (2016). *Grammar and vocabulary: Teaching students collocations*. Retrieved from <http://translationjournal.net/journal/52collocation.htm>.

Lelanguage.com. (2016). *The importance of learning collocations instead of individual words*. Retrieved from <http://ielanguages.com/blog/the-importance-of-learning-collocations-instead-of-individual-words/>

LEO network. (2016). *Learn English grammar*. Retrieved from <http://www.learn-english.de/grammar/sentencetext.html>

Phrase Mix. (2016). *The Importance of collocation*. Retrieved from <http://www.phrasemix.com/blog/the-importance-of-collocation>

Shitu, F.M. (2016). *Collocations errors in English as second language (ESL) essay writing*. Retrieved from <http://waset.org/publications/10003328/collocation-errors-in-english-as-second-language-esl-essay-writing>

The English Island. (2016). *Types of collocations*. Retrieved from <http://www.theenglishisland.com/types-of-collocations/>