EFL College Students' Skill in Using Collocations in Writing Essays

[1]Dewi Nopita

[1]English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Tanjungpinang, Indonesia
Corresponding email: dewinopita@umrah.ac.id

Abstract

Collocation is a natural order of words in which one word should be attached to another in a particular context. For students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL students), using collocations has been recognized to become a problem. This article is going to describe EFL college students' skill in using collocations in writing essays. 42 students from the same class were selected. They were the 4th semester students of English Education Study Program at Teacher Training and Education Faculty of UMRAH who took Essay Writing course in the academic year 2019/ 2020. The students were given a take-home assignment to write essays. Then, the essays were analyzed to find out the students' skill in using collocations. It was found that in using collocation in writing essays, 5 students had excellent skill, 14 students had good skill, and 23 students had low skill. The incorrect use of collocations consisted of lexical and grammatical collocations. Finally, it is hoped that these findings could be a useful input for future Essay Writing course.

Keywords: Collocation; Lexical Collocation; Grammatical Collocation; EFL Students' Essays

I INTRODUCTION

There are several aspects of word that should be learnt by English language students. The first is word class which is also known as part of speech. Word classes can be divided into the two broad classes; content words and function words. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are content words, conjunctions, and articles, as well as auxiliaries and words classified as `particles' are function words (Haspelmath, 2001). Then, another aspect is pronunciation. It is the way words are pronounced. The skill in pronouncing words is related to morphological and phonological knowledge (See (Antal P. J. van den Bosch, 1997)). The third is word meaning. This aspect requires English language students to memorize the meaning of words to expand their vocabulary. Antonym and synonym are included in this aspect. The last, but not least, is word use. One of its points is collocation. It is the "the habitual association of a word in a language with other particular words in sentences." (Robin, 2000). All in all, among these aspects of words, English language students tend to focus on word meaning.

The four aspects of word contribute to the students' skill in speaking, listening, and reading, but not to writing. Pronunciation has nothing to do with this language skill. In writing, students' understanding of word classes helps them construct grammatical sentences. Moreover,

by having this understanding, the students are able to order words correctly for they know which words precede or follow another. Next, students' understanding of word meaning related to their diction. When students have good understanding of word meanings, they will be able to use suitable and effective words for different kinds of writing (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Finally, understanding word use, particularly collocation, helps students produce native-like sentences (Nation, 2001)

As collocation is an aspect to produce a native-like piece of writing, it is of concern to be aware of. Collocation is a natural combination of words (Nation, 1990). This natural order occurs in a particular context. Collocation, then, is classified into two major categories; lexical and grammatical collocation (Benson, Benson, & Elson, 1997; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 2000). Lexical collocation is the relations between two or more content words that appear together naturally in a sentence. In English, there are nine subtypes of lexical collocation: (1) Verb +noun (e.g. break a code, lift a blockade; (2) Verb +adverb (e.g. affect deeply, appreciate sincerely); (3) Noun + verb (e.g. water freezes, clock ticks; (4) Adjective + noun (strong tea, best wishes); (5) Adverb + adjective (e.g. deeply absorbed, closely related; (6) Noun + noun (e.g. pocket calculator); (7) Verb+ adjective+ noun (e.g. learn a foreign language); (8) Adverb + verb (e.g. half understand); (9) Verb + preposition (e.g. speak through interpreter) (Deveci, 2004; Mahmood, 2005; Martynska, 2004). Then, grammatical collocations consist of a noun, or an adjective or a verb, with a particle (a preposition, an adverb or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive, a gerund, or clause) (Bahns, 1993). The grammatical collocations are lexicalized as a single unit whose meanings are formulaic. There are eight combinations of a noun, or an adjective or a verb, with a particle include in this category: (1) Noun + preposition combinations; (2) Noun + to + infinitive, (3) Noun + that-clause combinations; (4) Preposition + noun combinations; (5) Adjective + preposition combinations; (6) Predicate adjective + to + infinitive; (7) Adjective + that clause; (8) Collocational verb patterns (Benson et al., 1997). Since the topic of this work is collocations in EFL students essays, each subtype of these collocation categories are adopted as a consideration.

In the last decades, many researches have indicated that to produce collocations becomes a real challenge for foreign language students, even for those of advanced level (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Nesselhauf, 2003). Collocation errors are the most frequent errors found in the students' writings (Wible, Kuo, C, Tsao, N, Liu, & Lin, H, 2003). The types of errors cover both lexical and grammatical collocations (Alonso Ramos et al., 2010). Moreover, empirical studies on the knowledge of collocations among different groups of ESL or EFL learners reveal that learners face particular difficulty in producing appropriate word combinations due to their lack of knowledge of collocation (Howarth, 1998). Besides, the inappropriate use of collocations are also caused by the strategy of word-by-word translation (P, S, Mercer, & P, 1993). Other studies on the relationship between collocations and the language proficiency significantly show that there is a positive correlation between the students' use of collocations and their written language proficiency (Hsu, 2007). Finally, it seems that EFL students do have difficulties in using collocations.

In line with the previous researches, current work would like to find out the skill of English Education Study Program students of Teacher Training and Education Faculty (FKIP) of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH) in using collocations in writing essays. Most students are rarely exposed to English in their daily life that makes their English sounds Indonesian like. Referring to the course syllabus of Essay Writing employed in the study program, an essay is a piece of writing which consists of an introductory paragraph, several body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph in which all paragraphs discuss a single topic. Therefore, EFL students' essays, a term used in this article, refer to the essays produced by the 4th semester students of English Education Study Program of FKIP, UMRAH in the academic year 2019/ 2020.

II METHOD

This article is a descriptive research result conducted in English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty (FKIP) of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH). A descriptive research involves collecting data in order to get systematic, factual, and actual descriptions about the facts and the status concerning the subject of the research (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The participants of the research were 42 students of Essay Writing course in the academic year 2019/ 2020. Each of the students was given a take-home assignment to write an essay on topic she or he was interested in, which should be completed in 14 days. Then, the students' essays were analyzed manually to see their skill in using collocations by referring to following rubric:

Table 1. Collocation Scoring Rubric

Level	Category	Criteria
3	Excellent	85% of the total use of collocations are correct
2	Good	50%-84% of the total use of collocations are correct
1	Poor	Less than 50% use of collocations are correct

III RESULT

In general, the students' skill in using collocations in writing essays can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Students' Skill in Using Collocations in Writing Essays

Skill Level	Skill Category	Number of Students
3	Excellent	5
2	Good	14
1	Poor	23
1,52	Poor	

From the table, it can be seen that the 4th semester students' skill in using collocations in writing essays was poor. There were 5 students with excellent skill, 14 students with good skill, and the rest (23) students with poor skill. These findings have indicated that EFL students do have problems in using collocations when they are producing the language itself (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Nesselhauf, 2003; Wible et al., 2003). The following tables show several examples of collocations problems found in the students essays.

Table 3. Examples of Incorrect Lexical Collocations Used in the Students Essays and Their Equivalences in English

No	Incorrect lexical Collocations	Equivalent Meaning/ Collocations
1	Learn about It is a Verb+Preposition pattern	Learn The sentence should be *In Elementary schools; the students **learn** speaking, listening, writing, and reading.*

	The student's sentence is *In Elementary schools, the students **learn about** speaking, listening, writing, and reading.*	The word *about* in the student's sentence indicated that the students did literal translation from his mother tongue to English, that is *belajar tentang* into *learn about*.
2	Communicate to It is a Verb+Preposition pattern The student's sentence is *People **communicate to** others in English.*	Communicate with The sentence should be *People **communicate with** others in English.* The word *to* in the student's sentence indicated the result of using synonym. In this case, the student substituted the word *berbicara **kepada*** with *communication **to***
3	Tightly competitive It is an Adverb+Adjective pattern The student's sentence is *We have to face this **tightly competitive** era.*	Highly competitive The sentence should be *We have to face this **highly competitive** era.* The word *tightly* is the result of the student's mother tongue interference. She did literal translation by translating the word *ketat* into *tightly*.
4	Eating attitude It is a Noun+Noun pattern The student's sentence is *One of the similarities is **eating attitude**.*	Table manners The sentence should be *One of the similarities is **table manners**.* The phrase *eating attitude* is obviously seen as the result of literal translation from *cara makan* to *eating attitude*.

Table 4. Examples of Incorrect Grammatical Collocations Used in the Students' Essays and Their Equivalences in English

No	Incorrect Grammatical Collocations	Equivalent Meaning/ Collocations
1	Important in It is Adjective+Preposition pattern The student's sentence is *The English skill is very **important in** improving our self-quality.*	Important to The sentence should be *The English skill is very **important to** improve our self-quality.* The word *in* in the student's sentence indicated the result of using synonym. In this case, the student substituted the word *penting **dalam*** with *important **in***
2	Perception which they…………. The student's sentence is *The students have **perceptions which they need to learn all aspects of writing before they start writing**.*	Perceptions that they …………… It is a Noun + that-Clause combination The sentence should be *The students have perceptions **that** they need to learn all aspects of writing before they start writing*. Since the word *that* cannot be replaced by *which*, it belongs to Noun+that-Clause combination. Therefore, it proved that the student have lack of knowledge of collocation.

3	Effect in	Effect on
	It is a Noun+preposition pattern	The sentence should be *Motivation gives **effect on** learning English.*
	The student's sentence is *Motivation gives **effect in** learning English.*	The word *in* in the student's sentence indicated the result of using synonym. In this case, the student substituted the word *pengaruh **dalam*** with *effect **in***
4	A psychological pressure for……………	A psychological pressure to ………….
		It is a Noun+to+infinitive pattern
	The student's sentence is *It is **a psychological pressure for** have a broken family*	The sentence should be *It is **a psychological pressure to** have a broken family*
		Since the word *to* was replaced by *for*, it proved that the student have lack of knowledge of collocation.

IV DISCUSSION

The problems the students had cover both lexical and grammatical collocations (see (Benson et al., 1997; Deveci, 2004; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Mahmood, 2005; Martynska, 2004)). The collocation problems of the 4th semester students of English Education Study Program of FKIP, UMRAH deal with all types of collocations. However, it does not mean that the students have the same types of incorrect collocations.

The incorrect use of collocations found in the students' essays made the essays taste unnatural. In other words, the essays seemed to be the result of literal translation works. In addition, it seems that the use of collocations in the students' essays was interfered by the students' mother tongue due to the differences in the system of the two languages (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Bisk-up, 1992; Boonyasaquan, 2006; Ellis, 2001; Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Koya, 2003; Lewis, 2000; Nation, 2001; Nesselhauf, 2003; Phooncharoensil, 2010; Wang & Shaw, 2008; Yumanee & Phoocharoensil, 2011). One of the mother tongue interferences seen from the collocations the students used was the use of synonyms. The students tended to directly substitute an English word with a synonym in Indonesian that make them have problems in lexical and grammatical collocation

V CONCLUSION

Collocation is the attachment of one word to others which occurs naturally in a particular context of a language. In essays written by the 4th semester students of English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH) in the academic year 2019/ 2020, using collocations was a problem. It was indicated by the number of students of each skill category: 5 students meet excellent skill category, 14 students meet good skill category, and 23 students meet low skill category. The students possessed difficulties in producing both lexical and grammatical collocations. The students' difficulties were due to their mother tongue interference which was seen from the patterns of the identified incorrect collocations. On this basis, English language teachers and instructors of EFL students need to take collocation into account. They have to pay more attention to the teaching of this aspect. In teaching EFL writing, the students should be familiarized to collocations to make their writing products taste native like.

REFERENCES

Al-Maroof, R. A. S., & Al-Emran, M. (2018). Students' acceptance of google classroom: An exploratory study using PLS-SEM approach. International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning, 13(6), 112-123.

Allagui, B. (2014). Writing through WhatsApp: An evaluation of students writing performance. International Journal of Mobile Learning and Organisation, 8(3), 216-231.

Amin, F.M, & Sundari, H. (2020). EFL Students' Preferences on Digital Platforms during Emergency Remote Teaching: Video Conference, LMS, or Messenger Application?. *Studies in Language and Education*, 7 (2), 362-378.

Atmojo, A. E. P., & Nugroho, A. (2020). EFL classes must go online! Teaching activities and challenges during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *Register Journal*, 13(1), 49-76.

Azhar, K. A., & Nayab, I. (2018). Effectiveness of Google Classroom: Teachers' perceptions. *Prizren Social Science Journal*, 2, 52-66.

Barhoumi, C. (2020). The effectiveness of WhatsApp Mobile learning activities guided by activity theory on students' knowledge management. Contemporary Educational Technology, 6(3), 221-238.

Flatley, M. E. (2007). Teaching the virtual presentation. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 70(3), 301-305.

Gay, L. ., & Airasian, P. (2000). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Hamad, M. M. (2017). Using WhatsApp to enhance students' learning of English language "experience to share". Higher Education Studies, 7(4), 74-87.

Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020, March 27). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. EDUCAUSE Review. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-differencebetween-emergency-remote teaching-and-online-learning.

Iftakhar, S. (2016). Google Classroom: What works and how? Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 3, 12-18.

Manan, N. A. (2017). Whatsapp mobile tool in second language learning. Indonesian EFL Journal, 3(1), 87-92.

Megawati, F., & Astutik, Y. (2018, December). *EFL learning media: Perspective on E-Learning through Google Classroom* [Paper presentation]. Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Emerging Media, and Social Science, ICEMSS 2018, Banyuwangi, Indonesia (pp. 1-6). European Alliance for Innovation

Mujačić, S., Mujačić, M., Mujkić, S., & Bele, J. L. (2014, September*). Lessons learned from use of web conference in teaching programming* [Paper presentation]. Information Technology Based Higher Education and Training (ITHET) (pp. 1-8). IEEE Xplore.

Oriji, Abraham, & Anikpo, Fanny. (2019). Social Media in Teaching-Learning Process: Investigation of the Use of Whatsapp in Teaching and Learning in University of Port Harcourt. *European Scientific Journal*, 15(4), 15-39.

Prayogo, A., & Widyaningrum, L. (2019). WhatsApp-mediated language teachers' reflection of classroom practice: Experience of Indonesian context. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 61-82.

Rahman, A. W., Patintingan, A., & Indahyanti, R. (2018). Learning beyond the classroom: Whatsapp in language learning. Exposure : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris, 7(2), 71-89.

Tukan, F. M. E. (2020). Challenges and Strategies Using Application in Teaching Online Classroom During Pandemic Covid-19. *Elite Journal*, 2(2), 155-172.