

Developing Vocabulary of First Year English Specialization Students Based on the Reading Passages in the Prescribed Text “New Language Leader Coursebook 1”

Khine Su Hnin Aung¹, Ei Ei Chaw², Lei Lei Khaing³

Abstract

New Language Leader Coursebook 1 is used for first year English specialization students in the module teaching communicative skills 1 and 2. Reading texts of this book provides students with vocabulary of the respective contents. This paper is mainly concerned with lexical collocations or word combinations found in the reading texts. Collocation is a combination of words in a language that happens very often or frequently occurs together. The aim of this paper is to develop the collocation awareness of the students and to be able to use collocations appropriately and to improve their accuracy in using collocations. In this paper, lexical collocations were identified and categorized according to “The BBI Combinatory Dictionary”. It was found out that the most frequent type of lexical collocations is the L3 type “Adj+N/N+N” and the least frequent type is the L4 “N+V”. The conclusion presents that learners will improve the use of language more accurately and appropriately than before by studying lexical collocations in the reading texts from New Language Leader Coursebook 1. Moreover, language teachers need to make sure that their students know which word goes with which other word(s).

Key words: lexical collocations, word combinations, Language Leader

1. INTRODUCTION

Collocation is “the company words keep” – their relationship with other words (J.R. Firth, 2000). According to Lewis (2000), much of our vocabulary consists of prefabricated chunks of different kinds. Collocation is the most important kind of chunk. Teaching collocation should be a top priority in every language course. Collocation is the way in which words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing. It is considered as one of the most important things in teaching and learning English. If the words are used combining with unacceptable words, the language may not be accurate and natural. In spoken or written language, collocation errors are frequently observed. This is because of the poor mastery of collocations. This paper wants to point out that studying collocations can improve language accuracy.

1.1. Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to develop student’s awareness of collocations and to be able to use collocations appropriately and to improve student’s accuracy in using collocations. The objectives are:

- i. to find out lexical collocations,
- ii. to analyze the types of lexical collocations and
- iii. to examine whether all types of lexical collocations are found in the reading texts.

¹ Tutor, English Department, Hinthada University

² Tutor, English Department, Hinthada University

³ Assistant Lecturer, English Department, Hinthada University

2. Literature Review

McCarthy and O'Dell (2008) stated that a collocation is a combination of two or more words which frequently occur together in "English Collocation in Use (Advanced)". They described the three types of collocations: strong collocations, fixed collocations and weak collocations. According to Benson, Benson, and Ilson (2009), in English, as in other languages, there are many fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Such groups of words are called recurrent combinations, fixed combinations, or collocations. Collocations fall into two major groups: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations.

2.1 The need to build vocabulary

According to Deena Seifert (2016), there are top five reasons why vocabulary matters. The reasons are as follows:

- 1. Improving Reading Comprehension.** Research has shown that kids need to understand 98% of the words they read to understand what they are reading. Improving vocabulary skills will improve their understanding of novels and textbooks.
- 2. Being important to Language Development.** Children who develop a rich vocabulary tend to be deeper thinkers, express themselves better and read more. Improving language and literacy skills early in life will help them be more successful academically and communicatively.
- 3. Communicating Ideas.** Successful communication is dependent upon a good vocabulary base. Using the right words when talking, makes the learner a more effective communicator.
- 4. Expressing oneself in Writing.** Having a good vocabulary to draw from can help the learner write more effectively. Students need to use a more formal tone when writing – not conversational language – and to do that, they need a richer vocabulary to tap into those words we don't use when we speak.
- 5. Achieving occupational Success.** Researcher Johnson O'Connor found "a person's vocabulary level is the best single predictor of occupational success." Success in the business place depends on one's communication skills.

2.2 The definition of collocation

Rio Rini Diah Moehkardi (2002) states that language is basically a "compositional" process in which many of its words co-occur together forming single units of meanings. He calls these as lexical phrases or word combinations; and collocations are among other terms of lexical phrases. However, collocations themselves range from "lexico-grammatical unit" to "free combination". The term "collocation" is actually only one among other terms for similar concept: word combination. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) define collocations as "strings of words that seem to have certain 'mutual expectancy', or a greater-than chance likelihood that they will co-occur in any text."

Unlike collocations whose meanings are often unpredictable; 'free combination' consists of elements that freely allow substitution. For example, *decide on a boat*, meaning 'choose (to buy) a boat' contains the collocation *decide on*, whereas *decide on a boat*, meaning 'make a decision while on a boat' is a free combination. The possible combination of 'decide' (meaning 'making a decision') is limitless: *They decided — after dinner, immediately, at the meeting, with a heavy heart, etc.* A native speaker will not say: *They decided* (meaning 'choose') *at a boat*. To them *decided at a boat* (meaning to 'choose' a boat) is not collocable.

2.3 Lexical Collocations

In lexical collocations, there are fixed and loose combinations. Especially in verb + noun combinations, the combinations are fixed in which the choice of words that collocate each other is definite, such as: *commit a murder, or break the law* and these combinations: *do a murder, or damage the law* are unlikely. These fixed structures are idiomatic; however their meanings are still predictable from the elements of the combination. In comparison, in loose collocations, the words are freely combined, such as: *analyze/study/witness a murder* and *practice/study law*. The meanings of these loose collocations can still be derived from their individual words. In contrast, there are fixed combinations consisting of several lexical items which are relatively frozen expressions and whose meanings are sometimes hardly derivable from their component words, such as *to scream blue murder* ('to complain very loudly') or *get away with murder* ('someone who can do whatever they like'); and *lay down the law* ('give other people order in a bossy way') or *take the law into someone's own hand* ('deliberately break the law'). These fixed structures are called idioms.

The co-occurrence of two or more words in a lexical collocation has two important features. Firstly, there may be a constant collocational relationship between the two words that collocate although several words go in between them. For example, collocation "collect stamp" can be separated as: *They collect stamps; They collect foreign stamps; They collect many things, but chiefly stamps*. Secondly, lexical collocation does not seem to depend on grammatical types. So, collocation "strong argument" can be expressed, for example: *He argued strongly; or The strength of his argument; or His argument was strengthened*.

Types of Lexical Collocations

In "The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English (2009)", the types of lexical collocations categorized by Benson et al. are as follows:

L1: verb (usually transitive) + noun/ pronoun (or prepositional phrase)

This type of lexical collocation is called CA collocations because they consist of a verb denoting creation or activation and a noun/ a pronoun. For example:

(denoting creation) come to an agreement, compose a music, etc.

(denoting activation) set an alarm, launch a missile, etc.

However, not all verbs denoting creation and activation can be considered collocable to any nouns. Combinations of verbs, such as build, cause, cook, make, prepare, etc. + nouns are limitless, their meanings are predictable. Therefore these combinations are not considered collocations. For example: *build a house* (a bridge, roads), *cause damage* (death, deafness). Similarly, there are some nouns with polysemous meanings, such as the word "line" needs different verbs to collocate: *form a line* (meaning to line up) and *drop somebody a line* (meaning write somebody a letter)

L2: verb (meaning eradication and or nullification) + a noun

This lexical combination is called EN (eradication and nullification) collocations.

For example: *reject an appeal, revoke a license, annul a marriage, withdraw an offer, etc.*

Some verbs denoting similar meaning and that can be used with large number nouns are considered as free combination. For example the verb "destroy" can combine with almost any nouns denoting physical objects: village, school, document, etc.

L3: adjective + noun

In some instances, more than one adjective (or more than one form of the same adjective) can collocate with the same noun.

For example: *strong / weak tea; kind /kindest / best regards*

L4: noun + verb

The verb names an action characteristic of the person/things designated by the noun.

For example: *alarms go off; bees buzz; bomb explodes*

L5: noun + noun

This type of collocations indicates the unit that is associated with a noun

a. larger unit to which a single member belongs.

For example: *a herd of buffalo, a bouquet of flowers, etc.*

b. the specific, concrete, small unit of something larger, more general.

For example: *a bit of advice, an article of clothing, etc.*

L6: adverb + adjective

This type of collocations consists of an adverb and an adjective.

For example: *deeply absorbed, closely acquainted, hopelessly addicted, etc.*

L7: verb + adverb

This type of collocations consists of a verb and an adverb.

For example: *appreciate sincerely, argue heatedly, etc.*

2.4 Previous Research

1. In “Collocability as a Result in L2 Production”, Abba Brashi (2009) examined some EFL learners’ knowledge of English “verb + noun” collocations in terms of their ability to produce the type of collocations accurately and to test the participants’ receptive knowledge of the same type of collocation, “verb + noun” collocations. The study used two data collection instruments: a blank-filling test and a multiple-choice test. The result showed that the participant performed better at the receptive level than at the productive level with regard to English “verb + noun” collocations.

2. Kim, Hee Young, & Bae, Jungok. (2012) did a research on “The relationship of collocation competence with reading and writing skills”. A collocation knowledge test: both lexical and grammatical collocations extracted from the passages in reading test were given to eighty-six Korean university students who also took the reading test. Then, they were given a writing test relating to the content of the reading passages. Lexical and grammatical collocations found in their compositions were counted and classified using The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English. The researchers had found out that there were no significant correlations between the students' collocation knowledge and reading skills. However, a significant correlation was found between writing quality and collocation use.

3. The research “Lexical collocations in English: a comparative study of native and non-native scholars of English” had been conducted by Cuneyt Demira (2017). The goal of the study was to investigate the use of English lexical collocations in the texts written by native writers of English (NW) and non-native writers of English (NNW) and to examine whether there are any statistically significant differences between NW and NNW in terms of employing

collocations in their written productions. This research shows that native authors used much more collocations than non-native authors, which may be referred to a sign of strong correlation between being a native speaker and a non-native speaker of English.

1. Research Methodology

The lexical collocations in reading passages of New Language Leader Coursebook 1 were collected. They were categorized according to “The BBI Combinatory Dictionary”. Benson et al. proposed the seven types of lexical collocation, V (creation or activation) +N, V (eradication or nullification) +N, Adj+N/ N+N, N+V, N of N, Adv+Adj and V+ Adv. All of the collocations in each unit were calculated in frequency. The most frequent type of lexical collocation was presented and why lexical collocation is important in language accuracy was discussed.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The New Language Leader Coursebook 1 contains eight units consisting of five sub-topics respectively. Reading comprehension texts can be found in the first three parts of each unit. The topics presented in the course book are interesting and up to date.

In unit 1 “Personality”, the first reading text is about extroverts and introverts, introducing personality types. The second one is about method acting, exploring personality of the two method actors. The third text is about charisma, raising the question “Charisma: a kind of magic?” In this unit, among the seven types of lexical collocation proposed by Benson et al, (2009), six types of lexical collocation were found out, except L4 types of collocation. The collected data showed that twenty nine lexical collocations were used and L3 (Adj+N/ N+N) was found to be the most frequent type. It can be seen that eight of L1 (V creation/ activation +N/ P) such as “*have a party, taking action, doing my make-up, gives talks, etc.*”, one of L2 (V eradication/ nullification) “*give up on their dream*”, sixteen of L3 (Adj+N/ N+N) such as “*personality type, training schedule, prison sentences, critical judgment, etc.*” one of L5 (N1 of N2) “*a range of experiences*”, one of L6 (Adv+Adj) “*relatively rare*”, two of L7 (V+Adv) “*prepare thoroughly and work hard*” and none of L4 (N+V) were used.

In unit 2 “Travel”, an article about “Travel and Tourism” is presented firstly. It is followed by articles about famous explorers. Then, an article about Wilfred Thesiger, explorer of the “Empty Quarter”, is included. The total number of lexical collocations in unit 2 were twenty four, containing three of L1 “*go off the beaten track, set out on a hajj, fell in love with*”, one of L2 “*leave the country*”, eighteen of L3 such as “*holiday resorts, package tour, native city, greatest explorer, etc.*”, two of L6 “*very exciting and increasingly common*”, and none of L4, L5 and L7. The most frequent type is the L3 type.

In unit 3 "Work", the first reading text is job advertisements. The second one is an article about homeworking and the third one is blog comments about work placements. The vocabularies are concerned with jobs and works, the pros and cons of home working and different experiences of work placements. In this unit, forty seven lexical collocations were found out. When they were categorized, four types of lexical collocations were observed. They were seventeen collocations in L1 such as “*have experience, spend time, plan...schedule, etc.*”, twenty six collocations in L3 such as “*work-life balance, office space, good salary, etc.*”, two collocations in L5 “*a wide range of clients and a variety of UK*” and two collocations in L7 “*work closely and work well*”. The collocation types of L2, L4 and L6 were not found. As this unit describes jobs and work, it mostly uses the adjectives to emphasize the jobs such as “*competitive salary, a wide range of clients, work-life balance, rewarding job, etc.*”

In unit 4 “Language”, the first reading text is an advertisement of a language school. The second text is the three texts about English around the world, studying Chinese language and monthly online debate on English speaking. The third one is an article about avoiding mistakes online. There were altogether thirty two collocations. They were eight in L1 such as “*make new friends, take extra care, post a picture, etc.*”, two in L2 “*lost control and lost their job*”, twenty in L3 such as “*foreign language, native speakers, writing skills, etc.*”, one in L5 “*a series of online resources*” and one in L6 “*actively engaged*” and none in L4 and L7. Among them, the use of “*American English*” was observed 4 times in L3 category. The most frequent type of lexical collocation is L3.

In unit 5 “Advertising”, the three reading texts are an article about advertising, a for and against article about manipulating images and a newspaper article about advertising to children. The vocabularies included are concerned with advertising and the features of advertisements. There were five types in thirty three collocations. There are eleven collocations in L1 “*get our attention, telling...tales, reach their target, etc.*”, twelve collocations in L3 “*catchy slogan, usual practice, animated cartoons, etc.*”, two collocations in L4 “*A new report has concluded and Studies show...*”, seven collocations in L6 such as “*instantly recognisable, physically perfect, well aware, etc.*”, and one collocation in L7 “*think carefully*”. The types of L2 and L5 were not found out. The most frequent use of collocation type is L3. Unlike other units, this unit does not have many differences between the collocations of L1 and L3 type.

In unit 6 “Education”, the first reading text is an online discussion about single-sex schools. The second text is about Maria Montessori and her approaches to teaching. The third reading text is a newspaper editorial about free university education concerning paying university fees and education systems in different countries. Students are introduced a set of vocabulary related to education. There were altogether thirty nine collocations in the unit. Eight collocations in L1 such as “*make sense, get into debt, share their knowledge, pay more tax, etc.*”, twenty eight collocations in L3 such as “*mixed-sex schools, higher education, single-sex schools, etc.*”, two in L5 “*a number of reasons and the number of people*”, one in L7 “*feel strongly*” and none in L2, L4 and L6.

In unit 7 “Design”, the first reading text is from a design book and students are introduced word building and design adjectives. The second text is about design in different decades of the 20th century, focusing on vocabulary to talk about materials, shapes and textures. The third text of this unit is an article about “Alessi”, the famous Italian design company and things they designed. Thirteen collocations were found out. Three collocations in L1 such as “*have misconceptions, hold his meetings, and taking risk*”, seven in L3 such as “*innovative products, bottle opener, reasonable price, etc.*”, one in L4 “*the company was founded*”, L5 “*a piece of art*” and L6 “*commercially successful*” and none in L2 and L7. The most frequent type of lexical collocation was L3.

In unit 8 “Business”, the texts are a leaflet for new business, an article about business dilemmas and obituaries of business icons. The vocabularies are concerned with business terms and roles. Thirty nine collocations in six types were found out. There were twelve collocations in L1 “*set up your business, run the business, celebrated ... birthday, etc.*”, two collocations in L2 “*spend money and lose their jobs*”, twenty one collocations in L3 “*high prices, strong team, legal limits etc.*” and one collocation in L4 “*My first business failed*” and one in L5 “*a new range of cars*” and two collocations in L7 “*prepare carefully and work alone*” respectively. The L6 type of collocations was not found. The L3 type was mostly used in this unit.

Overall results of lexical collocations found in the reading texts from New Language Leader Coursebook 1

Total number of lexical collocations									
Unit	Topic	Lexical collocation types							Total
		L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	
		V+N/P	V+N	Adj+N/ N+N	N+V	N of N	Adv+ Adj	V+Ad v	
1	Personality	8	1	16	0	1	1	2	29
2	Travel	3	1	18	0	0	2	0	24
3	Work	17	0	26	0	2	0	2	47
4	Language	8	2	20	0	1	1	0	32
5	Advertising	11	0	12	2	0	7	1	33
6	Education	8	0	28	0	2	0	1	39
7	Design	3	0	7	1	1	1	0	13
8	Business	12	2	21	1	1	0	2	39
Total		70	6	148	4	7	12	9	256

According to the overall results, the most common type used in the texts was L3 type (Adj+N/ N+N). However, the data showed that all the seven types of lexical collocation can be seen in the reading texts of Language Leader 1. It can be assumed that there is no reading text without the use of collocations.

4.2 DISCUSSION

The present study is intended to find out and analyze the lexical collocations in reading texts of New Language Leader Coursebook 1. According to the overall results of the data analysis, the most frequent type of lexical collocation is L3. The second common use of lexical collocation is L1. The other types of lexical collocations are analysed respectively. The least frequent type is L4. The overall result is shown in the table. In this study, when collocations were collected, fixed lexical combinations and free lexical combinations were investigated. The differences between them are difficult to identify.

If students learn words through definitions or in isolation, their chances of using appropriate collocations and remembering the words decrease. When students read texts, they may not recognize collocations as meaningful phrases which would inhibit their understanding of the text. So, learners need to know that learning collocations is crucial to learning English.

In teaching new vocabulary, teachers should introduce a new word together with its frequent co-occurrence or its collocations. Learners should also be encouraged to guess the meaning of unknown words from the text first, then look up in dictionary and notice and be aware of other example words provided by dictionary. Dictionaries can be approached in a different way and to prove a worthwhile source of information. A good English-English dictionary usually provides one or two expressions or sentences demonstrating the use of a word, and these will probably contain one or two useful collocates of that word. Teachers

should encourage students to browse these examples for collocations. This needs to become an automatic habit. It can help students improve their collocational competence and even fluency.

Therefore, teaching collocations as a way to apply the lexical approach in the classroom is recommended. It is hard for EFL learners to cope with and to produce collocations effectively if collocations are not focused on and practiced. Mother tongue interference can affect producing collocations. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to raise awareness and teach collocations so as to enable EFL/ESL learners to master the language.

CONCLUSION

It was observed that, all types of lexical collocations were form in the reading texts from New Language Leader Coursebook 1. Studying collocations can provide language learners great benefits. The present study investigated and categorized lexical collocations because the use of word combinations is unique to the discipline itself, and each discipline needs to be studied in terms of collocations usage in order to give detailed insight about the use of collocations. By studying lexical collocations in the reading texts from New Language Leader Coursebook 1, learners will improve the use of language more accurately and appropriately than before. Moreover, language teachers need to make sure that their students know which word goes with which other word(s). Teachers should encourage students to record collocations in their vocabulary notebooks. They have a prominent role in helping the learners identify collocations in texts. It is hoped that learning these different types of collocations makes learners of English fully aware of the appropriate use of words in combination, not in isolation.

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